ALEX MINTZ, JOHN TYSON CHATAGNIER AND YAIR SAMBAN

TERRORIST DECISION-MAKING

A LEADER-CENTRIC APPROACH

Terrorist Decision-Making

This book analyzes a series of decisions by leaders of three major terrorist organizations and identifies a unique “Decision DNA” for each of them.

The authors use the Applied Decision Analysis methodology to examine organizational and operational decisions made by the leaders of three major groups: Hezbollah (Hassan Nasrallah), Hamas (Khaled Mashal), and al-Qaeda (Osama bin Laden). Decisions that were of critical importance to each organization are identified and analyzed, to uncover the particular decision rule employed by the leader in question and to establish their “Decision DNA.” A Decision DNA is unique to each leader and can be used to explain previous decisions or predict future choices. The authors demonstrate that the findings presented can be used to promote effective counterterrorism measures, and they provide a series of policy implications that arise from their examination of each leader.

This book will be of much interest to students of terrorist studies, political violence, security studies, and Middle Eastern politics.

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A Leader-Centric Approach
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Alex Mintz, John Tyson Chatagnier and Yair Samban

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1 The logic of terrorist leaders' decisions

In this book, we present a leader-centric approach to terrorism decision-making. We claim that while individual terrorists, cells of terrorists and other networks of terrorists make many tactical decisions, it is the leadership of terrorist organizations that makes the key strategic decisions. We therefore attempt to uncover the logic of terrorist leaders' decision-making using rational and psychological models of decision-making. To this end, we outline and implement a new strategy and method for uncovering terrorist leaders' decision rules.

Most studies of terrorism have focused thus far on the motivations of terrorists generally and suicide terrorism specifically. Nationalistic, religious and economic motives, as well as the desire for revenge, the existence of a charismatic leader and a significant quest have been found to motivate terrorists (see Post 1998; 2007; Kimhi and Even 2004; Harrison 2006; Post et al. 2009; Merari 2010; Perry et al. 2018). This research has contributed significantly to our understanding of terrorism and the suicide terrorist's mind. Nonetheless, it did not go into the strategic calculus and logic of terrorist *leaders'* decisions. Terris (2010, 1) however, has pointed out that the study of international political events, such as terrorism, "has shifted focus from states to leaders as the main unit of analysis." According to Terris (ibid.), leaders' decisions are "the proximate cause of events that drive international politics." It is the leader of the terrorist organization who makes the important decisions, even if there are a number of loose networks of terrorists that operate worldwide (see also Hermann and Sakiev 2011). The book therefore extends prior research on terrorism (e.g., Post 2007; Berman 2009; Merari 2010; Juergensmeyer 2017) by attempting to understand how leaders of terrorist organizations make decisions. We do so

by uncovering the Decision DNA or Decision Code of leaders of terrorist organizations.

Traditional terrorist campaigns are seldom the work of an individual terrorist acting alone. Instead, terrorist acts are usually parts of coordinated campaigns, directed by a larger organization (Pape 2003). Recent studies point to the important role played by terrorist leaders in maintaining organizational integrity and ensuring that the group operates efficiently. Abrahms and Potter (2015) show that effective leaders can solve principle–agent problems, allowing groups to target their attacks appropriately. Groups with leadership deficits are often prone to poor decision-making and unproductive attacks. Meanwhile, Wagstaff and Jung (n.d.) claim that decapitation (or leader capture) strategies can significantly reduce the effectiveness of terrorist groups.

Research focusing on the leaders of the terrorist organization as the unit of analysis is therefore essential to our understanding of this important phenomenon. As Berman (2009) pointed out, understanding terrorism, including suicide terrorism, requires understanding the organizations behind suicide terrorism. In particular, the underlying factors that shape decision-making of leaders. Some (e.g., Sageman 2004; 2008) have argued that *networks* should be the focus of the analysis of terrorists' decisions. Others (e.g., Berman 2009; see also Ward 2018) claim that terrorists (even suicide bombers) are best understood as "rational altruists." We claim that understanding why a decision was made requires understanding the decision logic of leaders. Networks are important, but networks as a whole do not make decisions. Individuals do. And leaders of terrorist organizations make the critical decisions.

Although terrorist organizations may, in many cases, operate with a semi-autonomous cellular structure, important decisions about approval and funding still tend to be made by the organization's leaders (see Hoffman 2008; Bacon 2018). Osama bin Laden, for example, was described as a sort of "chairman of the board" of al-Qaeda (Post 2007, 202), and Hassan Nasrallah acts as "supreme political leader as well as the … military commander" of Hezbollah (168). This implies that understanding these networks necessitates a greater understanding of the leaders themselves.

Berman (2009) has noted that the number of terrorist organizations throughout the world is relatively small. Indeed, between 1983 and 2003, five groups accounted for more than 84 percent of fatalities from suicide

bombings. Of these five major groups responsible for suicide terrorism, this book looks at three (al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah). We do so by introducing a theory of terrorist leaders' decision and a methodology to uncover the way these decision-makers make decisions.

The poliheuristic theory of decision-making

Much of the scholarship on terrorist decision-making suggests that terrorist decision-making can be largely understood as the product of rational calculations (e.g., Wintrobe 2002; Pape 2003; see also McCormick 2003; Hausken 2018). In other words, choices made by leaders of terrorist organizations are the result of goal-oriented, value-maximizing behavior where leaders choose the alternative that produces the best of all possible expected outcomes across all relevant dimensions. But it is also possible that terrorist decision-makers may choose among alternatives primarily on the basis of a single dimension. Terrorists may disregard large amounts of relevant information and ultimately choose targets that are not the "best" available. Moreover, that rational decision-making is cognitively demanding and frequently unrealistic is not a new suggestion (e.g., Simon 1957). The process by which individuals arrive at decisions may vary in a number of ways, including, for example, alternative-based vs. dimension-based information search (Billings and Scherer 1988); compensatory vs. non-compensatory information search (Payne et al. 1993); maximizing vs. satisficing decision rules (Sage 1990); and holistic vs. non-holistic search (Mintz et al. 1997). Moreover, these decision processes may critically affect the choice of the decision-maker.

A useful approach for explicitly taking into account the role of cognitive shortcuts in individuals' decisions is the poliheuristic theory of decision. The poliheuristic theory of decision postulates that leaders make decisions according to a two-stage decision process (Payne et al. 1993). They first simplify the decision problem by the use of cognitive shortcuts (heuristics). They then evaluate remaining alternatives using analytic calculations (Mintz 1993; 2003, 2004a; Mintz and Geva 1997; Mintz et al. 1997). One heuristic frequently used by political leaders in the first stage of the decision process is: avoid major political loss; accordingly, alternatives that are potentially harmful to the leaders are discarded outright (Mintz 1993; 1995; 2004a; Kinne 2005; Redd 2005; Mintz and Tal-Shir 2019).

Poliheuristic decision theory integrates elements of the rational choice school of decision-making with elements of the cognitive psychology school of decision. Key findings of the poliheuristic research program are:

1 Leaders use more than one decision rule en route to a decision. Specifically, decision-makers use a two-stage process in making decisions: they employ the non-compensatory, avoid-major-loss principle in the initial screening of alternatives, and use analytic decision rules in the second stage of the decision process.
2 Leaders evaluate gains and losses in political terms – domestic politics is "the essence of decision."

(Mintz 1997)

Poliheuristic theory has been applied widely by other scholars to the analysis of decisions by foreign leaders and US presidents: Dwight Eisenhower's decision not to send force to Dien Bien Phu (DeRouen 2003) and his decision to use covert forces in Guatemala (Taylor-Robinson and Redd 2003); Jimmy Carter's Iran's hostage rescue decision (Brulé 2005), Ronald Reagan's decision to intervene in Grenada (DeRouen 2001); George Bush Sr.'s decision to attack Iraq; Bill Clinton's Kosovo decision (Redd 2005), George W. Bush's 2003 decision to invade Iraq (Mintz and Derouen 2010), and several of Donald Trump's decisions during his first year in office (Lourie 2019).

The theory has also been used to analyze decisions by foreign leaders in democratic and non-democratic polities: foreign policy decisions made by Chinese leaders (James and Zhang 2004), the Soviet leadership (Kinne 2005), the Turkish parliament (Mintz 2004a), the Syrian leadership (Astorino-Courtois and Trusty 2000), Pakistani leaders (Sathasivam 2003; Kinne 2005), Iranian leaders (Maleki 2002), the Iraqi leader (Kinne 2005); and Palestinian leaders (Clare 2003; Mintz and Mishal 2003); the Indian government (Vijayalakshmi 2017); and British governments under Tony Blair (Opperman 2014) and Winston Churchill (Lvovscky 2019). Poliheuristic theory has even been applied to policy-makers' decisions at the state and local level (Christensen and Redd 2004). Multi-method tests of the theory (utilizing experimental, formal and statistical analyses)[1] have provided strong evidence for its applicability and usefulness in explaining leaders' decisions.

Poliheuristic theory is generic. It is applicable to a wide range of contexts, including national security decisions, diplomatic, foreign economic, environmental decisions and domestic decisions (e.g., Astorino-Courtois and Trusty 2000; DeRouen 2003; Sathasivam 2003; Beckerman-Boys 2014; Odinius and Kuntz 2015; Hallward and Guidero 2016; Lourie 2019). The poliheuristic procedure can be extended to sequential decisions, interactive decisions, in dynamic and static settings, in familiar and unfamiliar contexts, and under conditions of uncertainty and/or ambiguity.

The theory postulates a two-stage decision-making process. In the first stage, the decision-maker employs a non-compensatory decision-making strategy, which reduces the menu of alternatives through the elimination of options that are unacceptable on a critical decision-making dimension. A high score on a less critical dimension cannot compensate for a low score on the key dimension. In the second stage, the decision-maker chooses among the remaining alternatives by using analytic decision rules.[2]

Unlike other decision-making approaches (e.g., Friedman 1953; Steinbruner 1974; Kahneman and Tversky 1979), in poliheuristic theory dimension/s are often non-compensatory. In other words, a negative score on one dimension cannot be compensated for by a high score on another dimension. Alternatives are not evaluated simultaneously. Instead, individuals reduce the set of alternatives in the first stage by rejecting those options that fail to meet a minimum threshold on the key decision dimension (Payne et al. 1993). For example, if an individual's key decision dimension is "personal safety"—i.e., the decision-maker seeks to minimize personal risk—he or she is likely to eliminate alternatives that are likely to result in death or injury, despite other potential benefits of choosing those options.

In the second stage, a choice is selected from the remaining alternatives based on its ability to maximize expected benefits on other relevant dimensions (Mintz et al. 1997). Moreover, in contrast to rational models of decision-making that assume a maximizing principle in which the "best" alternative (the one with the highest net-benefit) is selected, poliheuristic theory postulates that individuals "satisfice" in the first stage of the decision process and maximize in the second stage of the process. The two-stage, multi-dimensional decision-making strategy posited by the poliheuristic theory does not privilege process validity over outcome validity, or vice versa (Mintz 2004a). Indeed, it mirrors the manner in which decisions are

often made as demonstrated by supportive evidence obtained across a range of diverse methodologies (e.g., DeRouen 2000; 2003; Redd 2002; Sathasivam 2003).

We argue that the poliheuristic theory of decision-making is the procedure that best explains the choices made by terrorist leaders. Because it places particularly high weight on important dimensions, the outcomes will often be consistent with utility-maximizing strategies and goal-oriented behavior. However, the flexibility of the theory and its descriptive as well as predictive nature also allow us to explain decisions in which leaders made seemingly suboptimal choices. Finally, the process described by the poliheuristic theory is more realistic and is likely to provide a more accurate depiction of the decision process of terrorist leaders.

Methodology: Applied Decision Analysis (ADA)

The book uses the Applied Decision Analysis (ADA) method to uncover the "Decision Code" of leaders of terrorist organizations. ADA provides a practical decision profile of leaders, which can easily be applied by experts and non-experts to understand and predict leaders' decisions (see Mintz and Tal-Shir 2019). To construct the decision profile, we "reverse engineer" a series of decisions by such leaders as the secretary-general of Hezbollah, Hasan Nasrallah; the late leader of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden; and former Hamas leader Khaled Mashal. ADA is an analytic procedure aimed at explaining and forecasting leaders' decisions. Each decision of these leaders has been analyzed using the following six ADA steps:

1 Identify the set of alternatives.
2 Identify the set of decision criteria.
3 Assign weights (importance levels) to different decision criteria (optional).
4 Identify implications for each alternative on each criterion.
5 Assign ratings (score) to each implication.
6 Identify the decision strategy (rule) used by the decision-maker.

Using this procedure has enabled us to uncover the Decision Codes of leaders. Furthermore, ADA allows scholars and policy analysts the ability to

use counterfactuals and sensitivity analysis on the set of alternatives and decision criteria.

The Decision Code of leaders consists of identifying decision rules and factors that influence the decision (the *how* and *why* of the decision). Our point is that each decision can fit one of several decision rules: for example, the rational, maximizing (MAX) decision rule (Arrow 1982; Friedman 1990), wherein the decision-maker simply chooses the alternative with the highest (weighted) aggregate value; the elimination by aspects (EBA) decision rule (Tversky 1972), in which the decision-maker moves down the list of decision criteria, from most to least important, eliminating alternatives that do not pass a pre-set threshold in each case; or the mixed, poliheuristic decision model (Mintz 1993; 2004a; Mintz et al. 1997), in which the decision-maker begins by using a non-compensatory strategy on a particular, key dimension (or set of dimensions), and subsequent to discarding alternatives unsatisfactory on the key dimension, employs a maximizing rule for choosing among the remaining alternatives.

The analysis shows that leaders of terrorist organizations analyzed in this book are extremely sensitive to threats to the survival of their organization and to other political factors (e.g., their political survival or inter-group rivalry). However, they process information and make decisions in different ways. We uncover specific "Decision Codes" for each leader using the ADA Procedure. We then apply our method and findings to an analysis of decision-making by the Islamic State (ISIS).

ADA is also a process for developing descriptive (and predictive) decision profiles of individual decision-makers on the basis of a decision model and a set of processing characteristics (see Mintz 2005; Mintz and Tal-Shir 2019). The procedure consists of two key steps. First, the analyst must identify the decision matrix of the decision-maker. The decision matrix consists of the alternatives, dimensions and implications of the alternatives corresponding to each dimension. The second step involves the analysis of each decision through the use of multiple decision models (MAX, EBA or poliheuristic theory) to ascertain how the leader made the decision.[3] The following is a step-by-step guide to using ADA to uncover decision profiles.

Step 1: identify the decision matrix of the decision-maker

The first step in understanding a leader's Decision Code is to build the leader's decision matrix. A decision matrix consists of a set of alternatives, the dimensions (or criteria) for selecting among these alternatives, and an assessment of the implications of each dimension for each alternative. Weights (or levels of importance) can be assigned to each dimension if the analyst observes that dimensions should receive unequal weight in the analysis. The analyst can use sensitivity analysis to determine the robustness of his/her finding, and counterfactual scenarios to analyze potential actions and reactions of leaders of terrorist groups.

Alternatives

The set of alternatives includes the likely courses of action a decision-maker may reasonably consider when faced with some problem or decision scenario. For example, when involved in negotiations with a state, a terrorist organization's leader may consider the following: "Continue with attacks," Temporarily halt attacks," "Stop attacks" or "Continue attacks while negotiating" (so-called "negotiation under fire"). In another example applicable to state leaders when faced with an international crisis, a leader may consider the following alternatives: "Do nothing," "Apply sanctions," "Containment" or "Use force." The set of alternatives that the analyst chooses can come from a variety of sources. In some cases, there may be documented evidence that the decision-maker was considering a particular set of choices. In other instances, determining the universe of choices may be a simple deduction given the problem. Regardless of how the information is obtained, it is important that the analyst always include at least the set of alternatives seriously considered by the decision-maker and other possible alternatives.

Dimensions

A dimension is an organizing theme for related information and variables relevant in evaluating the alternatives. Thus, if the leader of a terrorist organization is concerned with the political consequences of a decision while in negotiations with a state, then public support (Piazza 2008), the flow of financial contributions, recruitment levels (Crenshaw 2009), and other variables related to this general organizing theme (Bacon 2018) may be used to evaluate pertinent alternatives. Among other reasons,

organizations use terrorism to increase their market share of popular support (Bloom 2004). Examples of other dimensions that may influence the terrorist leader's decision are "Relations with other countries (e.g., Iran or Syria)" and "The likelihood of operational success." The analyst arrives at the relevant set of dimensions by gaining an understanding of the subject and his or her goals. Generally these are criteria that the decision-maker personally deems to be important. Thus, while the implications on each dimension may change, the set of relevant criteria and their respective weightings should remain relatively stable across decisions.

Weights

Weights indicate the importance level of each dimension, for example, from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (very important). Thus, in the terrorist leader example, the analyst assigns different weights to the political, diplomatic and operational dimensions, unless he or she considers each dimension to have equal weight in the decision. The decision criteria, or dimensions, for the leader of a terrorist group example might be: military, economic, political and diplomatic. If a leader was more concerned with the military dimension than with the economic dimension, then the analyst would weight the former more highly than the latter. Like the dimensions themselves, these weights are determined through expert coding and/or data analysis and a deep knowledge of the subject.

Implications

Implications consist of a description of the likely consequences of an alternative for a given dimension. Each alternative has implications corresponding to each dimension. For example, in the case of the terrorist leader, the "Stop Attacks" alternative has implications for the organization's political standing, relations with other countries, and operational success—which are all relevant dimensions. In an ideal scenario, the decision-maker will have documented his or her expectations about the effect a particular alternative would have for a certain dimension. However, the implications need not be as precise as the other components of the decision matrix, and can often be deduced from careful analysis of the problem, data and sources.

Ratings

Implications can be rated by the analyst, for example, from –10 (very bad) to +10 (very good), although assigning qualitative ratings to implications is also optional. For example, if choosing the alternative "Stop attacks" is likely to result in a serious loss of public support, the analyst should assign a negative rating (e.g., very bad, –9 or –10) to the political implications of "Stop attacks." In contrast, if "Continue attacks" is likely to lead to an outpouring of public sympathy and increasing recruitment levels, then this alternative should receive a positive rating (e.g., very good, or +8). These ratings should be assigned through expert analysis, and should ideally reflect the ratings that the decision-maker would assign to each of the decisions. Both precision and accuracy are important in assigning ratings.

Construction

Construction of the decision matrix can be done manually or with the support of software, such as the Decision Board (www.decisionboard.org/academic). The Decision Board has been used to develop and organize the information relevant to individuals' decisions via the construction of decision matrices. Once the researcher has chosen the number of dimensions and alternatives relevant to the decision, the Decision Board displays a generic matrix, which can be tailored to the specific research or policy problem. In structuring the problem, the analyst ultimately inputs the set of alternatives, the set of dimensions, the weights of the chosen dimensions (if relevant), and the implications of each alternative along each dimension. The choices in all of these cases should ideally be expert judgments. That is, for optimal performance, the analyst should have significant insight into the problem, and should know enough about the decision to make each of these coding choices with confidence.

Decision analysis

Once a decision matrix has been constructed (either manually or with the help of the Decision Board), it can be analyzed to uncover the decision rules employed by leaders of terrorist organizations.[4] For a Decision Board application of decision-making processes of would-be suicide bombers, see Mintz and Saper (2005). In the analysis stage, the study utilizes five

decision characteristics in order to categorize decisions. These five characteristics can largely define any decision rule. The first trait—holistic or non-holistic search—assesses the amount of information that the leader uses. If he fully exhausts all information applicable to each alternative along each dimension—as a decision-maker applying a truly rational strategy such as expected utility is expected to do—then he has used a holistic search. If the decision-maker selects an alternative before conducting an exhaustive search, for example, then the decision was made in a non-holistic fashion.

The actual way in which the decision-maker processes the information determines the classification of the search for information as dimension-based or alternative-based (ibid.). In an alternative-based search, the decision-maker acquires information about each alternative sequentially. Contrarily, in a dimension-based search, the leader obtains information about implications along dimensions, looking at each criterion successively. This is important because it affects the order in which certain implications are assessed, which has, in many cases, been shown ultimately to have the potential to affect the outcome. However, order only matters under certain (order-sensitive) circumstances. Some decision rules—primarily those that are holistic, such as expected utility theory—are order-insensitive. These decision rules contain the implicit or explicit assumption that outcomes should not be altered when information is presented in different, but qualitatively equal, ways.

The weights and ratings can help the analyst to combine the various implications of certain decisions—the “cognitive algebra” of the decision. Implications can be combined in additive or multiplicative manners. Under the former characteristic, the decision rule has a compensatory property: a high score on one dimension has the potential to compensate for a low score on any other. To combine implications in this manner, one would simply sum over the ratings for each implication, multiplied by their respective weights. The analyst can then compare these sums. When the implications are combined multiplicatively, the decision has a non-compensatory characteristic. In this case, the analyst takes the *product* of the ratings, multiplied by their weights. This means that an alternative can potentially be eliminated based on a low score on a single dimension (the most important, or non-compensatory dimension), even if it is superior across all other dimensions (see Mintz 1993; 1995; Mintz and Geva 1997).

Finally, decision-makers can choose the alternative with the highest overall utility, or alternatively, the one that is "good enough." The former is a maximizing strategy, which is generally associated with rational choice approaches, while the latter is a satisficing strategy. Decision rules that employ satisficing characteristics are also, by default, order-sensitive. Decision-makers utilizing satisficing strategies can search alternatives until one meets or exceeds a pre-set threshold of utility (as in cybernetic theory), or sequentially eliminate alternatives that do not meet a pre-set threshold along certain key dimensions until one remains (as in the elimination-by-aspect strategy).

Using these cognitive process characteristics, it is possible to discern the decision rule used by an individual in making these decisions.

Step 2: deduce the decision rule

Once the decision matrix has been constructed, the analyst can input data from a variety of relevant decisions. Armed with the knowledge of the set of alternatives that were available, the implications of each alternative along each dimension, and (in some cases) the process by which the decision took place, the analyst can identify the set of decision rules that are consistent with a particular choice. This procedure can then be repeated for many decisions to determine which decision rule (or rules) shows up most frequently. Having analyzed several decisions, the analyst can then deduce the rule that is most consistent with the leader's decisions.

In this book, we will use the ADA Procedure to analyze a series of decisions by leaders of terrorist groups including al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah, in order to uncover their decision rule (e.g., poliheuristic, lexicographic, maximizing). We create decision matrices and examine leaders' choices using primary and secondary sources cited throughout, as well as consultations with a number of subject matter experts. Through the analysis of multiple decisions for each leader, we demonstrate that the poliheuristic theory most readily explains the Decision Code of the organizations' commanders.

Organization of the book

This book presents an innovative theory and procedure for aiding policy analysts in analyzing past decisions made by terrorist groups as well as predicting future decisions of terrorists. In this chapter, we introduced the procedure—Applied Decision Analysis—generally as a framework for developing descriptive and predictive decision profiles of terrorists on the basis of a decision model or a set of decision processing characteristics (also see Mintz et al. 2006; Mintz and Ganel 2010; Chatagnier et al. 2012; Mintz and Adamsky 2019). It also discussed the decision model—the poliheuristic theory—which we argue is a useful tool for forecasting and analyzing decisions of terrorist groups. The theory guides analysts toward the identification of a non-compensatory decision dimension, which reduces the need to consider superfluous information. Throughout much of the rest of the book, we will illustrate the ADA Procedure with several case studies drawn from the Middle Eastern, European and US theaters.

The second chapter addresses the cognitive–rational divide in the decision-making literature. We discuss the ongoing debate between the two schools of thought, emphasize the importance of understanding the divide, and provide some suggestions for bridging the gap. In doing so, we will demonstrate the merits of the poliheuristic theory, and lay the groundwork for the use of ADA in subsequent chapters.

The third chapter focuses on Hamas. Using ADA, it examines numerous decisions made by Hamas leader Khaled Mashal relating to several rounds of Palestinian elections and political crises. We show how decisions by multiple leaders can be handled with the ADA technique.

The fourth chapter looks at the Hezbollah organization and its leader, Hassan Nasrallah. It examines Nasrallah’s Decision Code, and analyzes his decisions vis-à-vis Israel, Lebanon and Syria. We also show how different ADA analyses can handle the combination of multiple alternatives, and the analysis of counterfactuals.

The fifth chapter looks at al-Qaeda’s decision-making, analyzing multiple, past decisions by the organization using the ADA process. These include both decisions to attack the World Trade Center, organizational decisions pertaining to the attacks and the decisions to attack the USS *Cole* and to merge with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

The sixth chapter continues our discussion of al-Qaeda, looking specifically at decisions in the European theater, including al-Qaeda’s decisions to mount suicide attacks in Madrid and London. This allows us to

assess Osama bin Laden's historical decision characteristics in a different context. We also use this chapter to demonstrate the incorporation of uncertainty into ADA.

The book concludes by summarizing results and insights from our analyses and by recommending ADA and the Decision Mind simulator to policy analysts and decision-makers as a Decision Support System for explaining and forecasting terrorists' decisions. We conclude by applying our findings and method to the analysis of one of ISIS' key decisions.

1 A Special Issue of *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2004) edited by Mintz, offers theoretical extensions and multiple tests of poliheuristic theory using multiple methods (statistical, formal and experimental): DeRouen and Sprecher (2004) tested N-nations' initial reaction to crisis using a probit model; Dacey and Carlson (2004) used a formal model to illustrate, extend, and critique aspects of the theory, while Christensen and Redd (2004) and Mintz (2004b) used experimental methods to test the theory in familiar versus unfamiliar settings, as well as in comparison to the Bureaucratic Politics model (Christensen and Redd 2004). These multi-method tests of poliheuristic theory provided strong evidence for the theory.

2 Poliheuristic theory can be refuted and falsified if the decision process is compensatory, holistic, only alternative-based or order-insensitive.

3 ADA can be thought of as a small-to-medium-N method of analysis. Compared to multiple regression, it tends to use fewer data points (separate decisions), but each of these is explored in greater detail, allowing for a much richer context. Moreover, ADA allows the analyst to trace the *process* involved in each decision, which would be difficult, if not impossible, using regression.

4 For a Decision Board application of decision-making processes of would-be suicide bombers, see Mintz and Saper (2005).

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2 Cognitive and rational explanations of terrorist decision-making

The general decision-making process has long found itself divided between scholars who explain decisions in terms of rational, economic calculations (e.g., Deutsch 1954; Simon 1957; Morrow 1997) and those who use cognitive, psychological explanations (e.g., Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Levy 1992). The difference between the two schools ultimately comes down to an attempt to provide accurate explanations of results in the former and accurate explanations of processes in the latter (Mintz and Geva 1997; Stein and Welch 1997). It is thus unsurprising that there is a similar rift in the decision-making literature specific to terrorism.

Rational choice explanations

Decisions explained through rational choice tend to be predictions or justifications for decisions. The assumption made by rational choice theorists is a utilitarian one: actors make decisions in line with their preferences, pursuing the alternatives that they believe will bring them closest to the desired outcome (Simon 1955; Mintz and Geva 1997; Morrow 1997). Armed with this premise and the known conclusion (i.e., the decision which is being analyzed), rational choice scholars who are attempting to understand a decision seek simply to find the middle piece of the puzzle: why the outcome was preferred. Once the researcher knows this—assuming that the preference is stable and persistent—he or she can use it to predict future outcomes.

Quasi-rational choice analyses can be found among the oldest studies of terrorist decision-making (see McCormick 2003). The intent of such studies was to explain why a person or a group would choose to engage in political violence. The earliest were primarily moral and philosophical essays. Rational choice theories have also been used in highly sophisticated game theoretic frameworks to predict what terrorists might do (Bueno de Mesquita 2005a; 2005b; Kydd and Walter 2002; Hausken 2016; Spaniel 2018). Rational choice theories are applicable both to individual level analyses (explaining why an individual would join a terrorist organization) and group analyses (explaining why organizations would choose political violence).

Individual-level rational choice theories seek to explain how it might be rational for a person to become a terrorist (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita 2005b; Moghaddam 2009), or more often, how it is rational to become a suicide bomber (Wintrobe 2002; Iannaccone 2004; Harrison 2006; Perry and Hasisi 2015). They often employ findings from studies of sociological influences on potential terrorists (e.g., Hassan 2001; Blomberg et al. 2004; Drakos and Gofas 2006; Berrebi 2007; Abu-Lughod and Montoya 2016) and studies on psychology of suicide and deviant behavior (e.g., Becker 1968; Ehrlich 1973; Hamermesh and Soss 1974; Lankford 2013; Kruglanski et al. 2017) to construct models that forecast the circumstances under which participation in civil society would lead to a less desirable outcome.

While the potential rationality of political violence, much less suicide, may seem somewhat far-fetched, there is actually considerable evidence that, based on the anticipated rewards of such actions, the expected utility of becoming a suicide bomber can be higher than continuing to live as a peaceful member of society (Wintrobe 2002; Harrison 2006). The rational choice models that have been produced in recent years have stood out as elegant demonstrations of why a phenomenon utterly incomprehensible to most is so widespread. One such study is Ethan Bueno de Mesquita's (2005b) model predicting which individuals will turn to terrorism and when. Using a game theoretic model, which suggests that declining economic conditions increase terrorist supply while demand stays relatively stable, allowing organizations to choose the best from among potential applicants, he is able to explain two apparently contradictory empirical findings: that terrorists in general and suicide terrorists in particular tend to be at least as well off as their non-terrorist counterparts (Hassan 2001;

Krueger and Malečková 2003; but see also Lee 2011) and that nations with declining or less-developed economies are more likely to experience terrorist attacks (Blomberg et al. 2004; Drakos and Gofas 2006; Freytag et al. 2011; but see also Enders et al. 2016).

Rational choice studies applied to terrorist groups explain why the organizations employ violent means to pursue their goals. It has long been noted that terrorists see terrorism as the best strategy for achieving their political goals (e.g., Corsi 1981; Crenshaw 1990; Dershowitz 2002; Nacos 2003; Danzell 2011).[1] The capstone work in this area is most likely Robert Pape's seminal 2003 study, in which he claims that suicide bombing is a highly effective tool for eliciting political change. To support this claim, he looks at suicide campaigns between 1980 and 2001, pointing to an overwhelming number of successes and relatively few failures.

Despite what appeared to be a relative consensus that terrorism was (at least procedurally) rational, this idea has been challenged by a number of scholars. Despite Pape's claim that terrorism is effective in accomplishing political goals, he concedes that it would be "unlikely to achieve ambitious goals" (355). However, "ambitious goals" often accurately characterize the terrorist organization's agenda. Al-Qaeda's goals include the expulsion of non-Muslims from the Middle East and the re-establishment of a worldwide caliphate (Gunaratna 2002; Scheuer 2002; Schweitzer and Shay 2002; ICT 2005; Post 2007); Hamas, meanwhile, seeks the eradication of Israel and its replacement with an independent Palestinian state (Ganor 1992; Mishal and Sela 2000). These aims are anything but modest. They also remain wholly unachieved, despite lengthy terrorist campaigns.

It is this lack of ultimate success that has caused researchers to challenge the effectiveness of terrorism as a credible means to a political end (Crenshaw 1992; Abrahms 2004; 2018). These studies suggest that terrorism will not accomplish the ultimate, stated goals of organizations and that terrorists may or may not be aware of this. In the latter case, this would cause the expected utility from terrorism to be higher than the actual utility, meaning that the use of terrorism would remain procedurally rational, despite its actual ineffectiveness. In the former case, this would imply that terrorists had a second, unstated goal toward which they were working, such as building relationships with other terrorist groups and leaders (Abrahms 2008), or empowering the group to ensure continuity and political survival.

Cognitive psychological explanations

Scholars employing cognitive explanations for terrorism are interested in understanding *how* terrorists think and constructing profiles of the types of individuals who are likely to become terrorists. The purpose of such psychological analyses is to understand terrorists so that their actions might be predicted.

Because cognitive approaches are inherently psychological, they are restricted to the individual level. This is not to say that cognitive psychology is incapable of contributing to scholarly knowledge of terrorist groups. Indeed, the approaches outlined above for bridging the gap between the individual and group levels (i.e., analysis of leaders and stratification of individuals by group affiliation) would both be effective ways of applying the cognitive approach in a group context.

The idea of terrorism as deviant behavior and deviant behavior as a side effect of mental illness has given rise to a vast number of proposed psychoses from which terrorists might plausibly suffer (see Crenshaw 1992; Post 1998; Victoroff 2005). While this has been an area of study for decades, it has yielded no firm conclusions. As Victoroff (2005) notes, these psychological theories have been embroiled in "fierce controversy," and that the findings that have been reported have been based on "multiple nonscientific assumptions" and "impressionistic interpretations of … cases" (22). The problem with these approaches is that they generally require comparative psychoanalysis. This would necessitate psychiatric evaluations of multiple terrorists in an unclassified setting. Furthermore, even those cognitive psychological studies that do not require individual psychiatric analysis are often plagued by methodological problems that severely limit potential explanatory power (Mintz and Brulé 2009; Corner et al. 2016). Thus, it is unsurprising that relatively little progress has been made. Unfortunately, it is likely that progress will be similarly hindered in the near future.

However, this does not mean that psychological approaches are doomed to irrelevance. More recent studies that involved interviews and analyses of cases (e.g., Kimhi and Even 2004; Schweitzer 2005; Merari et al. 2009; Cohen 2016) have been able to contribute some understanding of what drives suicide bombers. While not based on medical diagnoses, and significantly less able to aid in predictions of behavior, studies such as these

do further academic knowledge of a potential profile of terrorists. This might be helpful in identifying potential terrorists and preventing them from taking such actions. Additionally, Post et al. (2009) stress the importance, not only of individual characteristics, but also of general context and social psychological factors in understanding suicide terrorism (see also Bloom 2009; Moghaddam 2009; Webber and Kruglanski 2018).

Cognitive considerations have also been used as alternatives to rational choice explanations, especially in the face of the recent challenge to the effectiveness of terrorism. It is not difficult to conceive of terrorism persisting even in the face of consistent large-scale failure if terrorists are primarily individuals who enjoy committing violent acts and for whom the goal of the organization is secondary (Post 1998), if they use terrorist acts to achieve some degree of personal significance (Kruglanski et al. 2009, 2014), if they simply commit terrorism in order to identify with some cause with relatively little concern for the specifics of that cause (Crenshaw 1992; Taylor and Quayle 1994; Abrahms 2008; see also Olsson 1988), or if, despite their limited success, they believe there is no other option (Schweitzer 2005; Victoroff 2009; Abrahms 2018).

Previous cognitive and rational analyses

In looking at previous analyses of decisions by and concerning terrorists and terrorist organizations, certain patterns emerge. Scholars have attempted to understand both general and specific questions, using approaches that run the entire spectrum from rational choice to cognitive psychological.

Table 2.1 lists numerous decisions that have been analyzed by scholars. The most general questions look at why an individual or group chooses to engage in terrorism in the first place; the most specific look at particular decisions. Other questions look at general types of decisions, which are less broad than the decision to engage in terrorism. Interestingly, the approaches that are heavily cognitive tend to be concentrated in the most general areas (e.g., Post 1990; Crenshaw 1992; Schweitzer 2005; Kruglanski et al. 2017). Scholars employing psychological analyses are interested in explaining why an individual engages in terrorism or suicide terrorism, or how terrorists generally view the world (Picucci 2008).

The rational choice approaches tend to be concentrated in the middle of the spectrum. While some of these studies have inquired broadly about how it can be rational to engage in terrorism or suicide terrorism (e.g., Wintrobe 2002; Abrahms 2004; Perry and Hasisi 2015), many look at more focused areas, such as peace talks between organizations and governments (Kydd and Walter 2002) or responses to government conciliation (Bueno de Mesquita 2005b). Because rational choice approaches are more readily applied to organizations, they can more easily explore a greater number of decisions, as is apparent in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Previous analyses of terrorist decisions

Decision	*Author(s)*	*Year*	*Approach*
The decision to use suicide terrorism even when it appears counterproductive	Abrahms	2004	Rational Choice
The decision to become a suicide bomber	Abu-Lughod and Montoya	2016	Sociological
Recruitment of individuals by terrorist organizations	Bueno de Mesquita	2005a	Rational Choice
Conciliation by governments and responses of terrorist leaders	Bueno de Mesquita	2005b	Rational Choice
The decision to become a suicide bomber	Cohen	2016	Psycholinguistics
Decisions to engage in terrorism	Crenshaw	1992	Cognitive (deviant behavior and mental illnesses)
The decision to become a suicide bomber	Harrison	2006	Rational Choice
Decisions to use violence to accomplish goals	Hermann and Sakiev	2011	Cognitive Psychological
Decisions to become and to recruit suicide bombers	Iannaccone	2004	Rational Choice
The decision to engage in terrorism	Kimhi and Even	2004	Psychological Profiling
The decision to engage in violent extremism	Kruglanski et al.	2017	Cognitive Psychological
Peace talks between organizations and states	Kydd and Walter	2002	Rational Choice
Al-Qaeda decisions to attack the i *Cole* and to merge with Egyptian Islamic Jihad	Mintz et al.	2006	Poliheuristic
Decision to attack foreign nationals in order to gain domestic influence	Neumayer and Plümper	2011	Rational Choice
Use of suicide bombing campaigns	Pape	2003	Rational Choice
The decision to become a suicide bomber	Perry and Hasisi	2015	Rational Choice
The operational code of terrorist organizations	Picucci	2008	Operational Code Analysis
The decision to engage in terrorism	Post	1990	Cognitive Psychological
The decision to become a suicide bomber	Schweitzer	2005	Psychological Profiling
The decision to become a suicide bomber	Wintrobe	2002	Rational Choice
Assignment of tasks to recruits	Spaniel	2018	Rational Choice
The decision to engage in terrorism	Webber and Kruglanski	2018	Social Psychological

Much like the differences in methodology within the psychological approaches—Crenshaw (1992), for example, applies theories of deviant

behavior and mental illness to the decision to become a terrorist, while authors like Kimhi and Even (2004) and Schweitzer (2005) employ psychological profiling of terrorists, and Picucci (2008) looks at the way in which terrorists view the world—the rational choice approaches differ in their method of analysis. Abrahms (2004) simply looks at the rationality of terrorism when the goals are not being accomplished. He attempts to discern the circumstances under which the use of a seemingly ineffective tactic can remain rational. This analysis is both interesting and useful; however, it is less sophisticated than the game theoretic approaches employed by Bueno de Mesquita (2005; 2005b), Kydd and Walter (2002), and Spaniel (2018). The use of game theory allows scholars to ask more specific questions and to get more precise, mathematical answers. The use of game theory ultimately allows the researcher to fine tune the level of specificity of his research question, from Wintrobe's (2002) general analysis of the rationality of suicide bombing to Spaniel's (2018) examination of operational assignments to Bueno de Mesquita's (2005b) and Kydd and Walter's (2002) far more specific looks at strategic situations involving negotiations between terrorists and governments. However, game theoretic analyses are somewhat limited in that they must deal with strategic interactions, and cannot be used for simple monadic expected utility questions.

Interestingly, the most specific decisions are analyzed by methods that are neither fully cognitive nor fully rational. Mintz et al. (2006) use the poliheuristic theory, which incorporates elements of both schools, in order to analyze specific decisions made by al-Qaeda. Like the rational choice approach, poliheuristic theory can be applied easily to a large number of decisions, and analyses enjoy many of the benefits of both rational and cognitive methods. The benefits that poliheuristic theory can bring to the cognitive–rational divide are discussed in more detail below.

Understanding the importance of the cognitive–rational divide

Scholars attempt to understand the way that terrorists make decisions because they are interested in knowing what it is likely that these individuals and groups will do in a given circumstance. Rational choice theories skip straight to the prediction stage by assuming a set of preferences over the possible outcomes. Because these theories are based

upon the supposition that individuals and organizations do what is in their best interest, they tend to be highly accurate and correct far more often than not. However, there are still frequently instances in which an individual or a group makes a decision that is (or appears to be) suboptimal. This may be because the decision-maker was not working with perfect information and based the decision on faulty data, or because the analyst's preference ordering was incorrect, or simply because the assumption of rationality did not hold.

Cognitive decision theories, which seek to understand more of the decision process before predicting the outcome, can assist in eliminating some of these possible errors. By knowing more about the way that a decision-maker processes information, an analyst can reproduce the decision-maker's decision method, including the biases that he or she might bring to the table. This would allow the investigator to be more certain about preference ordering, and it would be especially helpful in cases of incomplete information, in which the researcher can discern which pieces of information were processed and which were not.

However, studies based upon cognitive decision theory tend to lack the parsimony that is delivered by rational choice theory. That is, in order to understand the decision process truly, cognitive studies must be carried out for each individual decision-maker. A fully comprehensive understanding of how a decision-maker (e.g., Hassan Nasrallah) processes information and makes decisions would be an extremely powerful tool for predicting how *that particular individual* will act. However, it is unlikely to help much in predicting how *other* individuals (even those in similar circumstances) will behave. By contrast, rational choice theory purports to demonstrate how any individual will act in a given circumstance, making it far more generalizable and ultimately more useful in a broader range of circumstances.

Neither approach is fully effective on its own. While rational choice theories are useful in many cases, it is not possible to know when the theory is not applicable. Additionally, any rational choice approach could benefit greatly from additional information about the subject. Unless rational choice theorists acknowledge and assimilate the potential insights that can be generated by cognitive studies, even the most elegant models will see only limited applicability.

Bridging the cognitive–rational divide

Both the cognitive and rational schools can provide important insights into terrorism and terrorist decision-making. The most unfortunate result of the schism is that in general decision-making, "the strengths of one [school] often mirror the weaknesses of the other" (Mintz 2003, 3). This often leaves scholars with two well told half-stories that are difficult to connect.

Fortunately, the divide between cognitive and rational theories is not as wide in the decision-making literature on terrorism as it is in general. While rational choice theorists tend, regrettably, to pay little attention to cognitive explanations, those in the latter school generally acknowledge rationalist explanations. This may be a function of both the limited success and limited applicability of cognitive explanations. They are relatively unusable at the macro level, and even at the micro level, they have been unable to make any definitive assertions about terrorists thus far. If cognitive scholars begin to have more success—and perhaps also if they begin to focus on bridging the level of analysis divide, allowing them to discuss their results in a group context—a dialogue between the two schools may be possible.

Another potential bridge lies in poliheuristic theory, which is suggested as the link between cognitive and rational theories of general decision-making (Mintz and Geva 1997; Mintz et al. 1997; Mintz 2004). Poliheuristic theory's two-stage process is meant to tap the strength of cognitive explanations by providing an accurate description of the decision process, while maintaining the ability of rational choice methods to accurately predict an outcome. In the first stage, decision-makers employ a "noncompensatory principle" to reject any alternatives that fail to meet certain criteria (see Mintz 1993; 1995). In the second stage, the decision-maker selects an alternative from the remaining choices according to some other procedure, such as simple expected utility or a lexicographic decision rule. While it allows for specific information (e.g., the variability of the non-compensatory dimension) to be incorporated, the theory also provides guidelines that allow it to be applied to many different decision-makers.

When used as a component of the Applied Decision Analysis technique (see Mintz 2005; Mintz and Tal-Shir 2019), poliheuristic theory can be tested to form a "Decision DNA" for terrorist leaders (Mintz et al. 2006). This provides a substantial increase in information and predictive power,

while simultaneously bridging both of the two major schisms in studies of terrorist decision-making.

Additionally, poliheuristic theory has met with empirical success in identifying and predicting the decisions of terrorist leaders including Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah (Samban n.d.) and al-Qaeda's late leader Osama bin Laden (Mintz et al. 2006), as well as decisions by the Hamas group (Eisenband 2006). Its emphasis on the importance of political survival might also explain the point raised by Abrahms (2004) and Crenshaw (1992) that terrorist groups tend to pursue political violence for reasons of organizational perpetuation even in the face of limited overall success. Ultimately, the poliheuristic theory should not only provide a convenient means for bringing together multiple schools of thought, but should also prove to be a highly useful tool for terrorist decision analysis.

ADA and the Decision DNA of leaders

By utilizing ADA upon multiple choices of a single decision-maker, it is possible to construct a "Decision DNA" (or decision code), which can be used to map potential future choices. Constructing an individual's Decision DNA consists of using pattern recognition upon a large number of decisions. This involves the uncovering of the individual's decision matrix, and what dimensions are important or non-compensatory to this leader. The leader's processing characteristics (e.g., whether he is a rational decision-maker, an intuitive decision-maker or a poliheuristic decision-maker) also play an important role. With a thorough understanding of the Decision DNA of an individual—Osama bin Laden or Hassan Nasrallah, for example—we can create potential scenarios and predict likely outcomes, further refining its accuracy with each analysis.

ADA is an essential part of discerning the Decision DNA of terrorists and their leaders. It provides a comprehensive yet unified technique of process tracing and pattern recognition, and a highly useful and flexible analytical tool for understanding why the decisions take place. Further, it allows for evolutionary understandings of decision processes. As additional decisions are analyzed, and we gain more knowledge about terrorist leaders, we will be able to refine our decision-making model, and track other consistencies among decisions. The combination of tools in ADA—process tracing, pattern recognition and an analytical tool such as poliheuristic

theory, EBA or Maximizing rule—is necessary for creating decision profiles of terrorist leaders, and, conditional on their continued incumbency, ultimately for predicting what they will do in the future.

Decision DNA has important policy implications. If terrorists' decision rules are non-compensatory, for example, then policy-makers can have a better idea of what might *limit* or constrain a terrorist or terrorist organization. This can be employed both to predict what these leaders might do next, as well as to create disincentives for terrorist activities. By threatening a terrorist leader's key dimension, counterterrorist forces may be able to manipulate the leader's ultimate choice. This should underscore the importance of conducting many tests of terrorist decision-making, in order to ensure the robustness of the findings. Understanding one's enemy's Decision Code is a key to defeating the opponent, and learning the methods by which terrorists make decisions is a step toward limiting the success of terrorism.

1 For an alternative perspective, see Abrahms' (2008) claim that terrorism is more about networks and the creation of social capital than a means to a larger goal.

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3 Hamas' winding political path[1]

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This chapter uses the Applied Decision Analysis procedure to look into the decision-making process of former Hamas leader, Khaled Mashal, between 2005 and 2017. Mashal, who was one of the earliest members of Hamas, was appointed the head of Hamas' Political Bureau in 1996, and following the assassinations of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi in 2004, became the supreme leader of the terror organization until he stepped down on May 6, 2017.

By understanding the framework that underlies Mashal's decisions in several critical instances, and by identifying important similarities and differences, it is possible to uncover a "decision pattern" for the organization as a whole, and thus uncover the rationale behind its past and future decisions. Understanding the principles that drive Hamas leaders' decision-making is relevant not only in the immediate context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, but also in the broader international arena, where the United States, Europe, the Arab world and, to a different extent, Russia, are facing the dilemma of whether and how to support the various Palestinian factions, both politically and financially.

In this chapter, we apply the ADA method (see Mintz and DeRouen 2010) to the following decisions made by Khaled Mashal:

1 Accepting *hudna* in Cairo in 2005.
2 Participating in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections.
3 Kidnapping of Gilad Shalit in 2006.

4 Compromising during the November 2006 crisis in Hamas leadership.
5 Breaking the “Tahdiya” in 2008.
6 Signing the Cairo Agreement in May 2011.
7 Cutting financial dependency on Iran at the end of 2011.
8 Signing the Egyptian ceasefire proposal in Operation Protective Edge, in August 2014.
9 Entering limited cooperation with the Islamic State’s Sinai Province in late 2015.
10 Publishing the “new policy document” of Hamas in May 2017.

Our analysis of several decisions reveals significant consistency as Mashal consistently places an emphasis on Hamas’ political survival, and attempts to minimize the damage to its internal and external political situation. Both the public–political and the political–organizational dimensions appear to be of critical importance to Khaled Mashal. This pattern explains Hamas’ reluctance to de-militarize and reduce the scale of its “military wing” under Mashal.

Hamas

Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, is a Palestinian political party, as well as an armed organization that carries out terrorist attacks against Israel. The group was founded during the First Intifada, by its original leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and a number of others who left the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in the Intifada. Under its charter, Hamas was designed to be an Islamic organization, dedicated to fighting Israel (Abu-Amr 1993; Levitt 2006). The charter explicitly states that all of Palestine is Muslim land, and that the only solution to the problem that Israel constitutes is Jihad until Israel is completely obliterated. The founding document leaves no room for compromise (Maqdsi 1993).

Following the 2004 killings of Yassin and Rantissi, Khaled Mashal was inaugurated as supreme leader of Hamas. Under Mashal’s direction, the power of Hamas’ political faction has grown (Hroub 2004). In 2006, following an earlier boycott, Mashal opted to bring Hamas into the Palestinian Authority elections. The organization won a surprise victory over Fatah, bringing Ismail Haniya to the office of Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority (PA). In 2007, Palestinian President Abu Mazen

(Mahmoud Abbas) attempted to dismiss Haniya and appoint the centrist Third Way politician, Salam Fayyad, in his stead. The dismissal and appointment were disputed by the legislature and Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip where Hamas dominates, continuing to recognize Haniya as the legitimate Prime Minister (Cavatorta and Elgie 2010).

At the same time, the death of the organization's spiritual and political leader, along with that of his appointed successor, threw the leadership into a major upheaval. The two consecutive strikes at the top echelon of the movement's leadership created a situation in which the only member of the original Political Bureau who remained in the upper cadre of the organization was Khaled Mashal. In addition to Mashal, several "local" figures, influential leaders in the Palestinian scene, have emerged within the organization's leadership. Chief among these are Ismail Haniya, the former Palestinian Prime Minister and Mashal's successor, and Dr. Musa Abu Marzouk.

Khaled Mashal

An understanding of Mashal's background is useful prior to outlining and weighting the dimensions according to which he considers various alternatives. Mashal was born in Ramallah in 1956 and, like Yassin, joined the Muslim Brotherhood as a young man. While studying in Kuwait, he became an active opponent of Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), leading the Islamic Bloc in elections representing Palestinian students in Kuwait (Levitt 2006). Mashal was one of the earliest members of Hamas, initially leading the Kuwait branch, and becoming head of the organization's Political Bureau by 1996. In 1997, a botched attempt by Israel to assassinate him led to Yassin's release from prison. Later, following Israel's assassinations of Yassin and his successor, Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, Mashal was appointed supreme leader of Hamas. As leader, he has shown more ideological flexibility than Yassin (offering to negotiate with Israel to some extent), but continuously rejected any long-term notion of recognition for Israel's existence.

Identifying Khaled Mashal's decision matrix

Hamas was formally created as the Palestinian branch of the Arab fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood movement. From its inception, Hamas emphasized its triple nature as a political, social and religious movement, clearly and primarily focused on the Palestinian scene and on national Palestinian considerations. Hamas' organizational goals were stated explicitly in its 1988 Charter (Mishal and Sela 2000). Since then, and especially during the final months preceding the 2006 elections, Hamas leaders have restated the main tenets of its political program (Change and Reform 2006). These goals are mainly unchanged from 1988:

1 Bring an end to the Israeli presence in all of Palestine, through armed struggle (Jihad).
2 Spread belief in Islam and turn the Palestinian society into an Islamic society.
3 Aid the weak sectors in Palestinian society, including the poor and the families of prisoners.[2]

Given an understanding of Hamas and the backgrounds of Mashal, we turn now to a discussion of the key dimensions that he considered in making his decisions.

The political–organizational dimension

Because traditional decision analysis tends to focus on political leaders, the political dimension is often one of greater importance. It represents an alternative's effects upon the leader's political survival, or potential to stay in office (Kinne 2005). In the case of personalist autocrats, the definition is the same, but with its own quirks. Kinne (2005) suggests that in such situations, threats to the leader's power may arise from within his country or organization, or from without. Thus, the political dimension for a terrorist leader tends to be a measure of his personal honor and status among his colleagues and the radical Islamic world.

The political dimension is often—including in this case—the dimension of paramount importance. Leaders place their political survival above other concerns not simply because of an inherent desire to be in office, but because their other goals are not achievable without the position—if they do not lead their countries or organizations, they will have no effect upon future decisions concerning these countries and organizations. For Hamas, this

dimension indicates the concern for the organizational cohesion and survival of the various "wings" of the organization; Hamas consists of an ideological, political and military "steering group" located in Damascus (including its Political Bureau), a similar, subordinate leadership cadre in Gaza and the West Bank, a military arm, and a wide network of social and religious enterprises. Thus, the political–organizational dimension tends to be a key criterion for all of the organization's leaders, as survival is indispensable for furthering other goals.

The main potential threats to Hamas as an institutional body are retaliatory actions by Israel and the PA (and also, to a much lesser extent and only during the first half of the analyzed period, from limitations imposed by Syria as a result of American pressure). Such actions could be the consequence of the continuation or the escalation of the armed struggle. However, a solution to the conflict with Israel that does not put Hamas squarely in control (such as the recognition of Israel) is also a significant challenge to both the organization's cohesion, as it would undoubtedly factionalize the group, and diminish its relevance, as Hamas would be forced to make radical changes to its purpose. Indeed, Mashal has expressed the importance of the continuation of the struggle with Israel, and it is clear that he viewed the issue as paramount in his capacity as its leader. In a 2012 speech, reported by Elior Levy of *ynetnews.com*, for example, Mashal vowed that Hamas "will never recognize the legitimacy" of Israel. This position was not a departure from established Hamas doctrine, but a reiteration of a policy supported by a number of key Hamas leaders.

To some extent, adhering to the Hamas Charter is also a part of this dimension and related to maintaining the organizational structure of Hamas. In other words, Hamas' adherence to its ideology, as stated in the Charter, is important to maintaining its organizational structure. Thus, ensuring that Hamas remains active and committed to its mission was of prime importance to Mashal throughout his term.

The public–political dimension

The political influence of Hamas in the Palestinian street is based on its dual reputation as a major provider of social and charity services, and as a victorious military force that drove Israel out of the Gaza Strip. This influence should be preserved and, if possible, increased by Hamas' actions. While Yassin likely perceived the task of gathering and maintaining public

support to be important, it has become far more critical in recent years, as Hamas has established itself as a legitimate political party, gaining a majority of seats in the Palestinian legislature during the most recent elections in 2006. In order to maintain political power, Hamas will need to continue to augment its standing among members of the public. This raises the importance of public support for today's Hamas leaders. Moreover, Khaled Mashal's rise through the ranks of Hamas in its political wing suggests that the dimension may be especially important to him personally.

Although meaningful, the public support dimension seems to be perceived by Mashal as somewhat less important than its political–organizational counterpart, as the organization is not averse to taking public–political risks and making decisions that could have a negative impact on its public support. For example, in the long run, the decision to kidnap the Israeli soldier Shalit damaged the quality of life and popularity of Hamas' rule in Gaza, due to the blockade imposed by Israel on the Strip. However, Mashal did not hesitate to pursue this policy because of its advantage on the political–organizational dimension.

The religious dimension

Hamas, whose name is derived from an acronym for the Arabic *Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-ʾIslāmiyyah*, or Islamic Resistance Movement, is an ideological movement, whose actions are derived from its 1988 Charter and the words of the Koran. Although it does not bow to any external religious authority, such as Iran or even the clerics of the Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas leaders must take into consideration the spiritual and ideological commitment to Islam and the armed struggle they have taken upon themselves in the founding of their movement. On the religious dimension, Mashal's term is expected to exhibit an effort to comply with the basic articles of the Hamas ideology. This dimension is important, and ranks only slightly beneath the political–organizational and political–public dimensions. Since its inception Hamas has not wavered from its adherence to its ideology, except when political considerations required such a break from the strict tenets.

While religion is important to the organization and its leadership, we argue that Hamas tends to be pragmatic and relatively flexible in its adherence to its religious ideology, especially when rigidity might hinder the leaders' political goals. This was true even under the leadership of Sheikh

Yassin, who was a cleric and served as the movement's spiritual leader. Thus, for example, until the organization acquired legitimate political power in the Gaza Strip (2006), Yassin and Mashal did not insist on applying Islamic law or requiring the Palestinians to follow it, since they knew that this would hamper the organization's attempt to win political support. Therefore, the weight of the religious dimension is lower than the two critical political dimensions. The exact balance-point between the religious dimension (in the sense of the articles of the Islamic faith and the Koran, which the leaders might occasionally disregard) and the political–organizational dimension (in the sense of the set of formal obligations that play a key role in the organizational cohesion and the vision of the Hamas actor as a whole) is fluid, and dependent on interpretation. In other words: Hamas leaders with convincing religious credentials, such as Yassin, have the ability to interpret the religious ideology in ways that occasionally allow the movement some maneuvering space. The exact extent of this fluidity is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

The strategic dimension

Hamas, being more than simply a political movement, has an armed "wing," which serves as its tool in the pursuit of its military goals. The Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades are arguably the best organized and operative fighting force in Gaza and the West Bank. The military wing of Hamas consists of hundreds of activists and supporters capable of launching suicide attacks and rockets at Israel or engaging in guerilla-type skirmishes. This important component of the movement is currently subordinated to the political leadership, and must answer to the directives of the Political Bureau (Levitt 2004). This subordination was made clear during the months of the *hudna*, the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire in 2003. In the past, there have been instances in which the military organization did not bow to the political leadership's dictates. Therefore, as a strategic matter, one of Hamas' concerns must be the preservation of the loyalty and organizational stability of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. This will allow them to function effectively as a deterrent against Israeli aggression. While the maintenance of a strong military presence is important for the continuation of the armed struggle against Israel, it serves more as a means to an end than any sort of end in itself. This dimension has never been more important than the political success of the organization, as the political leadership has been

prepared, at times, to take actions that were not in accordance with the expectations of the military activists (for example, the military arm opposed the *hudna* and even threatened to continue the armed struggle in spite of the policy chosen by the leadership in Damascus).

Table 3.1 presents Khaled Mashal's general decision matrix. It depicts him as a commander who rose to the rank of supreme leader from the political wing of the organization, and thus subordinates religious and strategic concerns to political ones. Using this decision outline, we turn now to an analysis of several decisions made by Mashal during more than a decade as the head of the organization (between the years 2005 and 2017).

The decision to accept hudna in Cairo (2005)

In March 2005, directly after the presidential elections of January 2005, in which Abu Mazen was officially elected to succeed the deceased Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian Authority extended (with considerable Egyptian mediation) an invitation to Hamas—already under the leadership of Khaled Mashal, following Israel's assassinations of Yassin and Rantisi—to discuss a ceasefire with Israel and the incorporation of the movement into the PA organs. This proposal came as part of Abu Mazen's drive, emboldened by the wide mandate he received from the public in January, to achieve unity in arms, or more accurately, a monopoly of the PA security forces on Palestinian arms. This was an important step in the Palestinian state-building process as well as in the consolidation of the PA and its (then) ruling party, Fatah (Herzog 2006). The talks on the proposed *hudna* (ceasefire, specifically framed by all sides in this Islamic term, which means a temporary break in fighting in order to allow those fighting for Jihad time to reorganize) were showcased by Abu Mazen and Fatah speakers as an important attempt at "National Dialogue." Hamas was pressured to take part in this conference of reconciliation between the two main Palestinian factions.

Table 3.1 Mashal's general decision matrix

	Alternative 1	*Alternative 2*	*Alternative 3*	*Alternative 4*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational					10
Public–Political					9
Religious					8
Strategic					7
Weighted total					

By agreeing to send its representatives to Cairo to sit with the PA envoys, even though they represented an entity set up by the Oslo agreements and backed by Israel, Hamas entered a new stage in its development as a Palestinian and regional political actor. The result of these talks was, for the first time in the movement's history, a ceasefire between its armed forces and Israel, as part of a Palestinian package deal, which incorporated Hamas into the PLO/PA political and electoral system. Hamas was allowed to join the PLO, the main Palestinian representative and leading body, led by Arafat for decades. It was also allowed to participate in the upcoming elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). The ceasefire agreement (which was subsequently kept by Hamas, in spite of Israeli and American doubts) prevented Hamas from undertaking suicide and missile attacks against Israel. In effect, Hamas thus formally entered the Palestinian political arena as an independent actor, able to pursue its policies not only by changing its military and public-appeal tactics, but also on the parliamentary and electoral scenes.

Entering the Cairo negotiations and agreeing to a ceasefire indicated a significant change from Khaled Mashal's policy of rejecting any direct or indirect negotiation or compromise with Israel. This policy was the position of Hamas' collective leadership from its inception in the 1990s. By deciding to break the policy of uncompromising armed conflict, Mashal brought Hamas to the center of the Palestinian and regional political stage, but also agreed to severe limitations on the freedom of its armed operations.

Facing the Egyptian–Fatah offer to enter negotiations and sign a ceasefire, Mashal had several alternatives:

1 do nothing (refuse the offer to enter negotiations);
2 enter negotiations and continue the armed struggle (which would likely lead to the talks' failure);
3 agree to the ceasefire proposal, maintain the movement's right to retaliate to fierce Israeli attacks;
4 enter political process and start gradual disarmament (as per the "unity of arms" slogan).

Our analysis of this decision—arguably Mashal's most important step as leader of the Hamas Politburo—suggests that the public–political dimension became non-compensatory for the organization as early as 2005. During this period, Hamas faced eroding support both at home and abroad, and a ceasefire seemed to Mashal and other leaders to be the only way to "fine-tune [Hamas'] campaign of 'resistance' in a way that would win it back regional and even international support" (Milton-Edwards and Farrell 2010, 109). Continuing the armed struggle would only further alienate the Palestinian public and potential allies throughout the world.

Here, it is clear that the alternative of joining the discussions without agreeing to a ceasefire (Enter negotiations and continue armed struggle), was rejected based on Mashal's risk-aversion on the *public*–political dimension. In particular, he feared that, although it would not threaten Hamas' survival or internal cohesion, a refusal to join the national process would be a significant setback for the organization, politically. As shown in Table 3.2, the decision to continue the armed struggle received the best rating on all dimensions except the public–political one, and from a purely rational decision-making process, would have been the desired decision. History shows, however, that Mashal not only rejected this alternative, but also held true to the *hudna* until the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, well over a year after it was signed (and even after that, Hamas clearly refrained from breaking the Cairo accords). Thus, the public–political dimension was non-compensatory for Khaled Mashal. This decision—which coincides with Mashal's ascension within the organization—underscores the importance of the public–political dimension in recent years, and its rise to the role of critical dimension for Mashal. In this case, the gradual decision process that resulted in Mashal's choice of a satisficing alternative rather than a maximizing one, can be attributed to either the poliheuristic theory or to the EBA theory.

The decision to participate in the 2006 PLC elections

The January 2006 general elections to the PLC placed Mashal and the rest of Hamas' leadership, both within the PA and in the group's higher echelons in Damascus, in an acute dilemma. On one hand, the elections posed a unique opportunity for the organization to gain influence in the policy-making institutions of the Palestinian nation. This would be unprecedented for the Islamic Brotherhood, not only in Palestine but also in the Middle East at large, where it was barred from participating in the political process in neighboring countries such as Egypt and Jordan. On the other hand, Hamas' involvement in the political process might threaten the movement's strictly upheld principles of avoiding corruption and contact with Israel. Above all, the most acute concern raised by participation in the elections was the effect that political involvement would have on the strength and freedom of Hamas' military capabilities.

The clear results in the 1996 elections, the run-up to local elections during the first half of 2005, and reports from the "field" allow us to make some assumptions as to the likely result of the elections in case any of the following alternatives were chosen by Hamas:

Table 3.2 Mashal's decision to accept *hudna* in Cairo (2005)

	Do nothing	*Enter negotiations, continue armed struggle*	*Ceasefire*	*Gradual disarmament*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational (Critical)	No discernible effect on the inner-organizational dimension (0)	Strengthen organizational integrity and identity by participation in major political summit while not abandoning armed struggle (8)	Strengthen organizational integrity and identity by participation in major political summit; militant elements might object (4)	Strengthen organizational identity by participation in major political process; dissident militant elements are likely to oppose disarmament and cause inner strife (–3)	10
Public–Political (Critical)	Setback in popular support for Hamas due to refusal to take part in national process (–1)	Setback in popular support for Hamas due to refusal to support national process (–3)	Joining and contributing to the major political summit will increase support in the movement. Potential for public criticism in case of inaction against Israel (3)	Increased support in the movement following its cooperation in the National Dialogue; however, the weakening of its military capabilities might prevent it from gaining more support by actively striking Israel in the future (2)	9
Religious	Refusing to cooperate with the PA and to halt Jihad complies with the ideology of Hamas (10)	Cooperating with the PA means joining a body formed and allied with Israel. This is balanced by refusal to halt Jihad (3)	Agreeing to cooperate with the PA and to halt Jihad contradicts the religious ideology. However, *Hudna* is justifiable by Islamic law (1)	Relinquishing Jihad and joining the PA, sanctioned by Israel, contradicts the radical ideology of Hamas (–5)	8
Strategic	Maintain military strength, but potential for facing stronger opposition from PA in cooperation with Israel (2)	Maintain military strength, but potential for facing stronger opposition from PA in cooperation with Israel after the talks collapse (3)	Maintain military integrity and possibility to consolidate power protected by the ceasefire. Small chance that some activists might continue independent actions or leave the organization (2)	Major drawback for military arm as it has to be gradually incorporated in PA security (–9)	7
Weighted total	8.5	9.8 (max)	8.9	–11.5	

1 Do nothing (do not participate in the elections and continue the armed struggle)—in this case, the result of the election would probably be a massive victory to the Fatah, similar to the result in 1996.

2 Participate in the elections, continue attacks against Israel—this would probably give Hamas limited electoral success due to the mixed feelings among the Palestinian population concerning Hamas' armed attacks.
3 Participate in the elections, temporary ceasefire against Israel—this alternative would assure Hamas gains the maximum from the elections —both at the ballot box and following the elections, when it would be considered a legitimate major party by all actors. The movement would most likely be eligible to hold office in the government in this case.
4 Continue armed struggle, and actively oppose the elections, in order to sabotage the peace process and the consolidation of the Israeli- and American-supported PA. This could rapidly escalate into an armed conflict between the factions opposing the PA (Hamas and the other terrorist organizations) and the Palestinian security forces. Such an escalation might put to question the very existence of the elections, or at least compromise the validity of its results.

An analysis of Mashal's decision, depicted in Table 3.3, suggests that he rejected two alternatives during the first stage of the decision-making process. The alternatives of "Do nothing" and "Actively oppose elections" were immediately rejected, as they would severely threaten Hamas' organizational integrity. By 2006, the PA had become institutionalized to a sufficient degree that non-participants would find it difficult to be perceived as serious actors. Indeed, in discussing his decision to participate, Mashal claimed that by the time the elections occurred, "Hamas as a movement had reached a point where it could no longer avoid the electoral experience" if it wanted to avoid being labeled "a marginal movement" or one that operated "outside the framework of legitimacy" (Rabbani 2008, 68–69).

Thus, it is clear that in the initial stage of the decision, Mashal ruled out the political strategy that dated back to the establishment of the PA and the leadership of Sheikh Yassin, which involved ignoring the political process within the Palestinian leadership. Mashal believed that refusing to behave as a political entity would adversely affect the organization. Influenced by the pragmatic need to preserve the organizational integrity of Hamas, he therefore ignored the alternatives that would have reduced organizational significance to the point of political irrelevance. Interestingly, both alternatives that were eliminated initially were detrimental to Hamas on both the organizational– and public–political dimensions, and both surviving

alternatives were sufficiently beneficial. For this reason, it is not clear from this decision alone whether Mashal still found the public–political dimension to be critical. However, it is a possibility that cannot be ruled out.

Table 3.3 Mashal's decision matrix to participate in the 2006 PLC elections

	Do nothing	*Participate in elections, continue armed struggle*	*Participate in elections, temporary ceasefire*	*Actively oppose elections, continue armed struggle*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	Possible danger to Hamas' organizational integrity due to growing Israeli and/or PA pressure (–3)	Maintain Hamas' organizational integrity; possible Israeli retaliations in case of especially severe attacks might damage the organization (3)	Maintain Hamas' organizational integrity; potential to turn electoral gains into organizational benefits (by control of state funds, etc.) (7)	Major difficulty in maintaining Hamas' organizational integrity while facing an armed challenge on two fronts (–8)	10
Public–Political	Setback in popular support for Hamas (–4)	Limited increase in popular support for Hamas (2)	Considerable increase in Hamas' political influence (8)	Slight setback in popular support—Hamas will remain supported only by its "hardcore" followers (–2)	9
Religious	Complies with the principles of the Hamas Charter (10)	Political participation means cooperating with the PA, an Israeli-formed body, and even possible direct contact with Israeli officials. The impression of this is balanced by the armed attacks (–5)	The lull in the armed attacks and the collaboration with an Israeli-formed body is a significant contradiction to the religious ideology (–8)	Maximum adherence to the principles of Jihad and opposition of Israel; however, a clash with the PA will cause *Fitna* (civil war, vehemently forbidden by the Koran) (–5)	8
Strategic	Maintain Hamas' military strength. Possible damage due to Israeli retaliation (3)	Maintain Hamas' military strength. Some hardliners will resent cooperation with the PA. Possible damage due to Israeli retaliation (1)	Difficulties in maintaining Hamas' organizational integrity—many activists might continue independent actions or leave the organization (–3)	Initially, Hamas' military apparatus will be consolidated by the conflict; possible major difficulties in maintaining integrity while facing an armed challenge on two fronts (–5)	7
Weighted total	3.5	1.5	5.7 (max)	–17.3	

Of the two remaining alternatives, Mashal favored participating in the elections and maintaining the *tahadiya* (temporary truce)—this alternative proving to be the most beneficial to the organization, under the existing conditions. The ceasefire carried with it the potential for additional political gains, by showing a willingness on the part of Hamas to behave as a legitimate political organization. This suggests a maximizing heuristic in the second stage of the decision process, which fits with the poliheuristic model. However, this decision also can be explained by a purely rational model.

Why Hamas won?

Most observers of Palestinian politics have argued that Hamas won the 2006 election to the PLC because of an overwhelming anti-corruption vote by the Palestinians. However, this is only part of the reason for Hamas' success and likely not the most important. Rather, the primary reason for Hamas' success was that while Israel called its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip a "disengagement," Hamas took full credit for the suicide terrorism campaign that supposedly drove out the Israelis. It was rewarded with massive votes in Gaza and the West Bank and new stature in the wider region. Without the Israeli withdrawal, it is doubtful that Hamas could have won.

Another important reason for the outcome was the division within Fatah. Its list often ran multiple (competing) candidates against each other, while Hamas was far more disciplined in coordinating candidate strategy in each district. This split the pro-Fatah vote, greatly assisting the more united Hamas candidates. The Palestinian National Council has 132 members (plus the chairman), with 66 members elected in 16 multi-seat constituencies, and 66 seats assigned according to the proportion of the vote won by each party. The result of the proportional vote was even, with Hamas winning by a small margin. However, Hamas was able to capitalize on Fatah's division at the district level, where it won 45 out of the 66 seats.

During the campaign, Hamas heavily stressed its military resistance to Israel. This was a crucial component of the party's political success. One of its campaign slogans suggested that 10 years of negotiations with Israel had not produced the results of 5 years of sacrifice by military means, and a suicide bomber's mother (Mariam Farahat) was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) on the Hamas slate. Several other political parties (including Independent Palestine, headed by Mustafa Barghouti) had also

campaigned with the promise of fighting corruption but received relatively few votes. By contrast, several leaders of Fatah were re-elected—some on the national list while others in district election. If the vote had been strictly anti-corruption, some of these candidates would have been the first to be thrown out of office (although Marwan Barghouti, first on the Fatah list, was not accused by the Palestinians of corruption), and the other anti-corruption parties would have fared better.

Whereas the Israeli government's spin on their disengagement strategy influenced the opinion of observers in Israel and elsewhere, Hamas' marketing campaign and spin was the narrative accepted by Palestinian voters. They claimed that Hamas "martyrs," killing hundreds of Israelis during the Intifada of 2000–2003, were responsible for driving the Israeli military and settlers out of Gaza. Just as the suicide campaign of the fundamentalist Islamic group Hezbollah drove the Israelis out of Lebanon in 2000, Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza further empowered advocates of armed attacks such as Hamas. In the absence of a formal agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon introduced the concept of Unilateral Disengagement, considerably weakening Fatah and Palestinian Authority Chairman Abu Mazen. Instead of giving Abu Mazen the credit for the Israeli withdrawal (and in return getting an official agreement), the Sharon government decided to withdraw from Gaza unilaterally, bypassing and thereby fatally weakening the only partner it had: the Palestinian Authority led by Fatah. Rationalizing the Hamas win only on the basis of corruption in the Palestinian Authority is a spin by those who advocated democratic elections for the Palestinians and were shocked by the results. As former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon pointed out, it is an example of a radical Islamic success in the battle with the West.

A final factor contributing to the Hamas win was the rhetoric of the Iranian leadership, which gave Hamas (who, like the Iranian leadership, advocates the destruction of the State of Israel) a tremendous boost just before the election, and set off a marked increase in religious practice in the territories.

The decision to kidnap Gilad Shalit in 2006

In June 2006, Hamas broke the year-long ceasefire with Israel—as agreed upon in its negotiations with the Fatah leadership of the PA—and joined

three other militant Palestinian factions in a bold attack against an IDF border patrol in Gaza. The attack resulted in two dead Israeli soldiers and another, Cpl. Gilad Shalit, captured by the attackers. In the crisis that followed, Israel launched a painful military strike on Gaza, hoping to coerce Hamas and the other factions into releasing the soldier. Hamas initially denied knowledge of his whereabouts, but subsequently stated that he would be released only in exchange for Israel releasing more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners (a demand that was ultimately accepted by Israel in 2011).

The decision to attack the Israeli border patrol and break the ceasefire was a result of Hamas' role in the leadership of the PA. Khaled Mashal, as the key decision-maker in the movement (being superior to both the Hamas political leadership in Gaza and to the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam military brigades responsible for the attack), considered in this decision the relative deadlock in which the Hamas-led PA was mired. The joint efforts of Fatah, who had integrated its security forces with the Hamas-led Ministry of Interior, and the international community, which denied the Hamas government access to much-needed funds, created a situation in which the organization was very much strained in its attempt to govern. The main political issue seemed to be Hamas recognition of Israel, a declaration that would have paved the way for increased international cooperation. In fact, this issue had a secondary significance, since "local" Hamas officials already cooperated with Israel when needed. The real question was whether Hamas was willing to share power, in the sense of formally agreeing to abide by past agreements signed by the Fatah-led PA (and putting its own armed wing under the control of the PA ministries). Presumably, with Israel heightening its incursions and attacks in the Gaza Strip, Hamas' military forces pressured the Damascus-based political wing into launching a bold kidnapping operation against Israel, in order to gain a bargaining chip to exchange for the Palestinian prisoners (a very important political issue in the deadlock with Fatah). Clearly, any organization able to force Israel to release prisoners would gain considerable political leverage (Schweitzer 2011).

Facing the deadlock in running the government, and the growing unrest of the military activists, Khaled Mashal had several alternatives:

1 do nothing (and hope the crisis would fade);
2 engage Fatah and attempt to compromise;
3 consolidate Hamas' power-base in the Gaza Strip, using its armed forces against Fatah;

4 renew quality attacks against Israel.

Our analysis, shown in Table 3.4, indicates that the decision to attack Israel and kidnap one of its soldiers was chiefly political, stemming from Mashal's risk-aversion. Here, the critical nature of the public–political dimension comes into play for Mashal once more. While the "do nothing" and "compromise" alternatives could be rejected immediately because of the consequences of failure to respond to Fatah and the international community—Mashal faced imminent organizational deterioration if he refrained from answering Fatah's maneuvers forcefully—the option of using armed force against Fatah could have survived the first stage only if organizational concerns were paramount. However, there was an acute need to strengthen the movement's popular image as it was facing severe governing challenges, making the public–political dimension critical as well. For this reason, Mashal was forced to eliminate that alternative as well, leaving only one option. This two-stage elimination process can be explained both by the poliheuristic theory and the EBA theory. The decision to renew hostilities against Israel was therefore motivated by Mashal's fear of losing the considerable political gains Hamas had made in the last year. Notably, this is also the alternative that would have been selected by a strictly rational decision process.

Mashal's decision regarding the November 2006 crisis in Hamas leadership

In November of 2006, the conflicting politics of Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian arena came to a head in another round of Egyptian-brokered talks between the Abu Mazen administration and Khaled Mashal. This time, Hamas entered the new round of talks with several important chips in its hands, as well as several disadvantages. The kidnapped Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, and the continuous barrage of Qassam rocket fire at Israeli towns gave Hamas an unmitigated military advantage—an important issue in the tri-lateral system encompassing Israel, Abu Mazen and Hamas, which had to be addressed successfully in order for Israeli attacks against the Gaza Strip to cease. On the other hand, the political deadlock between the elected Hamas government, led by Ismail Haniya, and President Abu Mazen had led to growing anarchy in the Gaza Strip during the months following the February 2006 elections. In addition, the PA was unable to raise the critical

funds needed for its economic and social recuperation from the quagmire it had experienced in recent years. An important aspect of the Hamas organization is that the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades operate in coordination with other Palestinian armed factions in the Gaza Strip, under direct command from Hamas headquarters in Damascus (i.e., Khaled Mashal), while Ismail Haniya and the “local” political leadership of Hamas have virtually no influence on their actions and policy.

Table 3.4 Mashal's decision matrix prior to Gilad Shalit's kidnapping

	Do nothing	*Engage Fatah in negotiations*	*Consolidate Hamas power-base in Gaza*	*Renew quality attacks against Israel*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	Possible danger to organizational integrity due to growing Israeli and/or PA pressure (–3)	Weakens organizational integrity as many will oppose compromising with Fatah (–3)	Maintain organizational integrity; possible damage to organization due to friction with Fatah and/or Israeli involvement (0)	Quells inner frustration at apparent inaction. However, major future difficulty in maintaining organizational integrity while facing a renewed conflict with Israel (1)	10
Public–Political	Setback in popular support for Hamas (–4)	Movement might be criticized for compromising on its principles (–1)	Movement might be criticized for causing inner strife (*Fitna*) (–1)	Potential to regain popular support as Hamas strikes at Israel (5)	9
Religious	No contradiction with the principles of the Hamas Charter (0)	Engaging Fatah means ratifying the PA's agreements with Israel (–8)	Contradicts the Islamic warnings against internal strife (*Fitna*). However, this promotes the Islamization of Palestinian society (3)	Maximum adherence to the principles of Jihad and opposition of Israel (10)	8
Strategic	Maintain military strength. Possible damage due to Israeli attacks (3)	Weakens military strength as cooperation with PA security organs grows (–3)	Difficulties in maintaining integrity facing skirmishes with Fatah and possible Israel involvement (–3)	Initially, military apparatus will be consolidated by the conflict; possible major difficulties in maintaining integrity while facing a renewed conflict with Israel (–5)	7
Weighted total	–4.5	–12.4	–0.6	10 (max)	

On November 25, Mashal arrived in Cairo for the final stage in the latest round of negotiations between Hamas and President Abu Mazen. In his final statement, Mashal indicated that his movement was ready both to agree to a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (referring mostly to the Qassam rockets fired by various militant factions), and to enter negotiations on a new Palestinian

unity government, with a new Prime Minister to replace Haniya. These two points represent a significant landmark in Hamas politics, given the developments since the Islamic movement's rise to power.

Khaled Mashal's position as supreme leader of Hamas was slightly more "dovish" than it had been in previous months during which he rejected other attempts at both reforming the Palestinian government and coming to an agreement with the Israelis. The "local" leadership lost some of its influence and prominence vis-à-vis the Hamas Politburo in Damascus, but retained some political leverage stemming from their legitimacy as a party elected to public office. Here, we show why Mashal accepted a truce with both Abu Mazen and Israel.

Mashal's general goals can be derived from the Hamas movement's overall goals as described in previous sections:

1 Continue the armed struggle to end Israeli presence in all Palestine (Jihad).
2 Spread belief in Islam and turn the Palestinian society into an Islamic society.
3 Aid the weak sectors in Palestinian society, including the poor and the families of prisoners. This goal has proven difficult to achieve due to the international boycott that plagued the Palestinian Authority after Hamas' victory at the polls, and crippled both Abu Mazen and Hamas' attempts at securing outside aid for the population.

The dimensions against which the various alternatives will be considered remain unchanged from previous sections, and represent the set of dimensions within which the leaders of the Hamas movement operate. However, this decision is different from those analyzed above since the relative *importance* of the dimensions had changed. In particular, the military situation had recently become more relevant. Because the context of the decision was different from previous Hamas decisions, a summary of the four relevant dimensions follows:

Organizational–Political: Retaining Hamas' organizational cohesion and the standing of Mashal in the organization remains a crucial dimension (Wt. = 10; unchanged).

Public–Political: Maintaining and strengthening the political influence of Hamas in the Palestinian public, as represented in opinion polls, election

results, and other forms of political expression in the open Palestinian society and press (Wt. = 9; unchanged).

Strategic: Allowing the constant build-up of Hamas' military arm in Gaza, which currently has several thousands of fighters, is capable of launching rockets (presently without guiding systems) and suicide attacks, and of armed resistance to Israeli incursions into the Gaza Strip. Relative to the decisions analyzed above, this dimension has become slightly more important. The efforts of the movement in the months prior to the decision, in terms of the constant smuggling of arms from Egypt and the construction of its armed forces (both the Izz ad-Din a-l-Qassam guerillas and the new regular "Executive Force") show the relative importance of this dimension (Wt. = 8; relative increase).

Religious: Maintaining the image of Hamas as a "pure" Islamic entity and adhering to the strict principles stated in its 1988 Charter. This dimension is important to the long-term goal of setting up an Islamic society in Palestine and to encouraging donations and funds from like-minded contributors throughout the Muslim world (Wt. = 7; relative decrease).

The alternatives facing Khaled Mashal in the November 2006 round of talks were similar to those he took into consideration in the previous round of *hudna* talks in early 2005:

1 Complete Rejection: Refuse to enter any negotiations with the PA, which would imply indirect negotiations with Israel and its US backers.
2 Reject Compromise: Enter negotiations, but refuse to compromise on the important points of current Hamas policy: Haniya's post as Prime Minister and the continuation of rocket fire from Gaza.
3 Partial Compromise: Agree to a "package deal," comprising a partial cessation of hostile activities and a reformed government without official Hamas presence.
4 Total Compromise: Agree to a complete ceasefire and step down from Palestinian government.

Mashal's decision, shown in Table 3.5, seems to have been relatively simple. Both extreme options—complete rejection and total compromise—were detrimental on both political dimensions and were simply bad for Hamas in general. One threatened to subordinate Hamas too greatly to other groups, while the other risked tearing the organization apart. Neither of these options could be seriously considered by Mashal. Of the remaining alternatives,

neither threatened Hamas' political standing on either the public or organizational criterion. Choosing between these two options was not difficult, as the partial compromise provided far greater utility to Mashal and to Hamas. Indeed, even from a purely rational perspective, the most advantageous course of action for Mashal was to enter the Cairo negotiations and form a compromise with Abu Mazen. The importance of his decision here lies not in the complexity of the decision calculus, but on the considerable personal and religious prices Mashal was ready to pay for his decision: entering a ceasefire with Israel and requiring his top Gaza aide, Haniya, to step down from office. This is certainly evidence that both personal and religious factors were compensatory for Mashal. Furthermore, as the analysis shows, this course of action was unequivocally the best in view of the potential danger to the organization from the continuation of the present state.

Table 3.5 Mashal's decision to compromise in 2006

	Complete rejection	*Reject compromise*	*Partial compromise*	*Total compromise*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	Danger to organizational integrity in case "local" elements in Gaza would prefer to "break line" and cooperate with legitimate Palestinian leaders (–3)	Maintain organizational integrity by engaging in dialogue with Pal. leadership; possible Israeli retaliations in case of especially severe rocket attacks might strengthen elements calling for compromise (5)	Maintain organizational integrity by engaging in dialogue with Pal. leadership; potential to gain international funds and/or recognition (and thus further bolster the organization) while retaining possibility to break the ceasefire (7)	Major difficulty in maintaining organizational integrity since both the political and military leadership in Gaza would oppose this step (–8)	10
Public–Political	Potential setback in popular support for Hamas in case of organizational schism (–1)	Increase in popular support as Hamas is seen as representing the "pro-resistance" camp (2)	Maintain present popular support for the movement (0)	Major setback in popular support—Hamas will be seen as unable to hold government and/or continue resistance (–5)	9
Strategic	Possible damage to military assets due to Israeli retaliation (–4)	Possible damage to military assets due to Israeli retaliation (–4)	A ceasefire will allow the movement's armed forces to continue their training and build-up (5)	A politically weakened Hamas will not be able to prevent all its military elements from acting independently and breaking the ceasefire. This will lead to increased Israeli retaliations and damage to military assets (–5)	8
Religious	Complies with the principles of the Hamas Charter (10)	Participation in the political process means indirectly cooperating with Israel. The impression of this is balanced by the "hawkish" position at the table (0)	Significant contradictions with the Charter, because of the lull in the armed attacks and the collaboration with an Israeli-backed President (–8)	Difficulties in proving adherence to the principles of Jihad and opposition of Israel (–10)	7
Weighted total	–0.1	3.6	5.4 (max)	–23.5	

In the interplay between Hamas' two centers of power, the Politburo in Damascus, led by Khaled Mashal, and the political leadership in Gaza, led by Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, the organization reached an agreement on engaging the Abu Mazen administration based on Mashal's two points: (1) cessation of rocket fire from Gaza Strip and (2) formation of a new Palestinian government led by a figure not directly associated with Hamas. The fact that both leading figures, Mashal and Haniya, agreed to enter negotiations based on this platform is not trivial, since both leaders had possible reasons to choose other alternatives.

Mashal's decision to relinquish the unequivocal position for which he had stood since the *hudna* talks in 2005 can be explained by a number of models, including a conventional rational choice model, in which Mashal calculated that any other alternative would damage the political cohesion of his movement or prevent it from continuing its military build-up in the Gaza Strip. In the Palestinian political wrangling following Mashal's November 25 statement, the negotiations over the formation of a new "unity government" failed, resulting in President Abu Mazen's supporters calling upon Haniya to resign, and a vehement refusal from his side. It can be posited that Haniya took this development into consideration when he agreed to Mashal's proposal. It is also true that Haniya, being obviously inferior to Mashal in the Hamas hierarchy, did not have much of a choice in this decision.

The decision to break the Tahdiya in 2008

Due to the constant rocket attacks launched against Israel following Hamas' violent takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, Israel declared Gaza a hostile entity. The situation escalated as rockets were fired repeatedly from Gaza, and Israel engaged in retaliation operations such as Operation Hot Winter, as well as reduced the supply of oil and electricity to the Gaza Strip. In June 2008, under the leadership of Ehud Olmert, Israel prepared for an extensive operation in the Gaza Strip, while simultaneously trying to negotiate terms for a ceasefire with Egypt and Hamas, in order to avoid having to launch the military operation.

Following a few months of negotiations through Egyptian mediation, a 6-month Tahdiya (a temporary lull) was established on June 19 between Israel and the Gaza Strip under the Hamas regime. For 5 months, the Tahdiya held fairly well. While occasional rockets were still fired into Israel, the attacks

were of a much lower intensity, and in most of the cases, were carried out by non-Hamas militants. Even though Hamas seemed increasingly willing and able to suppress these attacks and Israel avoided retaliation, each side believed the other was not fully respecting the Tahdiya's terms; although Israel gradually began to loosen the blockade of Gaza, it didn't lift it completely due to the continuing rocket attacks from Gaza (Bronner 2008). Israel made ineffective demands including that Hamas fully eradicate the rocket attacks and to achieve progress regarding the release of Cpl. Gilad Shalit from captivity, while Hamas unsuccessfully demanded that Israel lift the blockade on Gaza (Zanotti et al. 2009).

By November 4, the situation had escalated, and the Israeli army entered 250 meters into the Gaza Strip in search for a tunnel intended for the abduction of Israeli soldiers. While Israel referred to it as a defensive "pinpoint operation," Hamas denounced it as a "massive breach of the truce" and significantly increased the quantity and intensity of rocket and mortar attacks on Israel, approaching the pre-truce levels (Bennett 2008; McCarthy 2008).

On December 20, Hamas officially declared that it refuses to extend the ceasefire since Israel failed to fulfill its terms. Instead, Hamas offered to re-establish a ceasefire under new terms, including Israel's commitment to lift the blockade and refrain from operating in Gaza (Harel et al. 2008). On December 24, Hamas fired a total of 87 rockets into Israel and the rapid escalation led Israel to initiate Operation Cast Lead on December 27.

Mashal's alternatives during the Tahdiya were:

1 Stay committed to the Tahdiya but overlook its violation by other militant groups, which will eventually erode the Tahdiya.
2 Stay committed to the Tahdiya from start to finish and put efforts into restraining all other militant groups in Gaza.
3 Extend the Tahdiya.
4 Stay committed to Tahdiya while looking for a good trigger for breaking it. Such a trigger could be used by Mashal as an excuse to give a formal green light both to the military wing of Hamas and to the other organizations in Gaza to resume the rockets attacks and Jihad against Israel.

Mashal's decision is given in Table 3.6. Hamas desperately needed to improve the situation in Gaza; Mashal realized that the Tahdiya was not

bringing the awaited relief and therefore Hamas had fewer incentives to maintain it, let alone extend it. Spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said in July that "Easing restrictions on Gaza crossings is going very slow and the population doesn't feel that there is basically a real truce and a normal life" (Abu-Ramadan 2008).

Table 3.6 Mashal’s decision to break the Tahdiya in 2008

	Stay committed to the Tahdiya while overlooking its violation by other militant groups	*Stay committed to the Tahdiya from start to finish and restrain other militant groups*	*Extend the Tahdiya*	*Stay committed to Tahdiya while looking for a good trigger for breaking it*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	Maintain organizational integrity. Yet, Hamas is portrayed as incapable of ruling other organizations in Gaza. Moreover Militant elements might object (–1)	Maintain organizational integrity as Hamas demonstrates hegemony over all organizations in Gaza. Militant elements might object (2)	Possible danger to organizational integrity due to conflicts with militant factions within Hamas (–4)	Proclaiming the upper hang against Israel and taking a step forward in the implementation of Jihad. Might lead to Israeli retaliation that will harm key Hamas leaders (4)	10
Public–Political	Potential setback in popular support for Hamas due to loss of credibility as the leader of the armed resistance (–1)	Setback in popular support for Hamas due to loss of credibility as the leader of the armed resistance (–3)	Major setback in popular support as Hamas will be seen as unable to continue resistance (–5)	Taking a firm stand against Israel as representative of the "pro-resistance" camp will increase Hamas' support. Yet, severe Israeli retaliation might cause some setback in popular support (3)	9
Religious	Halting Jihad contradicts the ideology of Hamas. This is balanced by enabling other factions to execute jihad and by a ceasefire for re-arming being justifiable by Islamic law (6)	Halting Jihad contradicts the ideology of Hamas, yet a ceasefire for re-arming is justifiable by Islamic law (3)	Halting Jihad contradicts the ideology of Hamas, yet a ceasefire for re-arming is justifiable by Islamic law (3)	Renewal of Jihad complies with the ideology of Hamas (10)	8

Strategic	Maintain military integrity and possibly to consolidate power while protected by the ceasefire. Small chance that some activists might continue independent actions (2)	Maintain military integrity and possibly to consolidate power while protected by the ceasefire. Small chance that some activists might continue independent actions or leave the organization (−1)	Maintain military integrity and possibly to consolidate power while protected by the ceasefire. Greater chance that some activists might continue independent actions or leave the organization (−2)	Possible damage to military assets due to Israeli retaliation (−7)	7
Weighted total	4.3	1	−7.5	9.8 (max)	

At the same time, a random breaking of the Tahdiya would have damaged Hamas' image in the international arena and would not allow it to exhaust the potential benefits of the move. Renewing the attacks near the end of the lull, preferably following a justifiable trigger, would put pressure on Israel and establish Hamas as the proactive and stronger party moving into the next stage of the conflict. For this reason, Mashal chose to stay committed to the Tahdiya while looking for a good trigger to break it—an alternative that allowed him to get the best of both worlds. On the one hand, he managed to gain credit for as long as the lull held, and on the other, by deciding unilaterally on the ending of the Tahdiya he proved that Hamas set the tone in the conflict and forced Israel to respond from a weaker position. His firm reluctance to extend the Tahdiya, unless under Hamas' new terms, demonstrates his aspiration to use this escalation as a stepping stone to improve his position in the negotiations at the end of the agreed-upon timeframe of the Tahdiya. The Israeli violation of the lull on December 4 was a sufficient trigger for Mashal.

In this case, Mashal's final decision could be explained both by any of the three models: rational, poliheuristic or EBA. In the first stage, the options to extend the Tahdiya or to stay committed to it while overlooking its violation by other organizations were eliminated due to negative scores in the political–organizational dimension. This is the most important dimension for Mashal and earlier decisions have shown that it is non-compensatory. In the second and final stage of the decision process, Mashal sought to maximize the utility of the two remaining alternatives, by selecting the alternative with

the highest added value across all of the decision's dimensions. The comparison between staying committed to Tahdiya and looking for a good trigger for breaking it was rather easy as the latter provided far greater utility to Mashal and to Hamas. This suggests a maximizing heuristic in the second stage of the decision process and at the same proves that the strategic factor was compensatory for Mashal.

The decision to sign the Cairo Agreement in May 2011

Since the Cairo Declaration, which was signed in 2005 by 13 Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, initiatives for intra-Palestinian reconciliation attempts between the different factions (in particular, between Hamas and Fatah) have occurred on a yearly basis. With the exception of the Mecca Agreement in 2007 and the Sana'a Declaration in 2008, most of these attempts have failed to produce mutual understandings, let alone concrete agreements. It is worth mentioning that neither of the two dealt with the reconciliation itself but rather declared a ceasefire or emphasized the need to establish a framework for a reconciliation process. Furthermore, when it came to the Sana'a Declaration's implementation, immediate disagreement regarding the declaration's interpretation emerged between the two sides.

Following the Oslo Accords, the PLO (and, by implication, Fatah) formally recognized Israel and denounced armed resistance. However, Hamas' refusal has been the bone of contention between the two factions as well as the main reason for which Israel opposes these reconciliation efforts. The grounds for Hamas' refusal are both ideological and religious as it opposes any implication of recognition of the Zionist occupation of Palestine that Hamas considers as an Arab Islamic country.

Yet, on May 4, 2011, President Mahmoud Abbas and Khaled Mashal formally signed an agreement, which held that a "transitional" government of technocrats would be formed in order to enable legislative and presidential elections for the PA in 2012 (Greenberg 2011). The agreement also permitted Hamas' entry into the PLO and declared that though the PA was to remain in charge of security in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, they would form (after the elections) a joint committee to regulate future security arrangements (Agreement between Fatah and Hamas 2011).

The alternatives for Mashal prior to signing the agreement were as follows:

1 Do nothing; do not engage in any reconciliation talks and continue as usual.
2 Engage in reconciliation talks superficially but without intent to reach and sign a concrete agreement.
3 Sign the Egyptian reconciliation agreement.
4 Reject the agreement and blame it on Fatah; divert attention away from Hamas by launching a smear campaign against Fatah.

Mashal's alternatives were similar to those he faced in his previous decisions concerning reconciliation with Fatah. Yet, the ramifications of each alternative cannot be fully understood without the regional political context. Since there was no significant change in the positions of either Hamas or Fatah regarding any of the core issues, nor was there a change in their priorities, Mashal's non-trivial decision to sign the agreement this time can be attributed to changes in the geopolitical situation.

The Arab Spring and the revolutions across the Arab world increased Mashal's sensitivity to Palestinian public opinion, which firmly advocated reconciliation. Furthermore, regime change in Egypt had strategic implications for Mashal. The idea of a plausible rise to power for the Muslim Brotherhood was a game changer for Mashal as leader of the Brotherhood's subsidiary Palestinian movement. The fall of the former regime, which feared the strengthening of Hamas and tended toward Fatah in most cases, was perceived by Mashal as Hamas' chance to improve its bilateral relations with Egypt, its natural ally. At the same time, the shaky situation in Syria, which threatened the Assad regime also endangered Hamas' position in Damascus. It is plausible that Mashal saw the Egyptian agreement as a trust-building gesture toward Egypt, a potential ally who could replace the unstable Syria (Crisis Group Middle East Report N°110 2011).

The analysis, depicted in Table 3.7, suggests that the alternatives of "Do nothing" and "Reject the agreement and blame Fatah" were immediately rejected as they would politically harm Hamas and even threaten its organizational integrity. By the beginning of 2011, the situation in Syria was already chaotic and Assad, whose regime had supported Hamas and Mashal since 2001, expected the movement to endorse him and his regime publicly. Hamas, however, had been supporting various protest movements around the Arab world, and feared turning the Sunni majority in Syria against it. Therefore, though it officially thanked the regime for its support of the movement, it avoided taking sides in the internal Syrian war. Hamas'

ambivalent policy deepened the gap between its leadership and the Assad regime to the point that Hamas leaders stated that although they had not been formally asked to leave Syria, they hoped to prepare other options just in case (Crisis Group Middle East Report N°110 2011). From Mashal's point of view, Egypt could serve as a natural ally to Hamas and could substitute for Syria as a home for the movement. This was due to both Egypt's geographical proximity to Gaza and the organization's common ideological background with the Muslim Brotherhood, which seemed to be gaining power at the time. This also explains Mashal's sensitivity and patience toward Egypt, despite the latter's failure to open the Rfiah border pass as expected, stating that

Table 3.7 Mashal's decision matrix for signing the Cairo Agreement in May 2011

	Do nothing	*Engage in reconciliation talks with no intention to sign an agreement*	*Sign the Egyptian reconciliation agreement*	*Reject the agreement and blame it on Fatah*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	Weakening organizational integrity as the leadership status in Syria deteriorates. Rejecting/ignoring the Egyptian proposal will harm relations with Egypt—which could be a close ally (–5)	Strengthening organizational integrity; buying some time and satisfying Egypt while not abandoning armed struggle. Might harm relations with Egypt in the future (5)	Strengthening organizational integrity and image by improving relations with Egypt (the lifeline to Gaza). As part of the PLO, Hamas is gaining international legitimacy on the expense of Fatah. The specific agreement does not require far-reaching compromises yet militant elements might object (6)	Possible damage to organization due to clashes with Fatah (–2)	10
Public–Political	Major setback in popular support for Hamas due to refusal to take part in the reconciliation. Strong criticism for Hamas' violent riot control in Gaza (–9)	Increased support for Hamas for as long as the negotiation lasts. Yet, a plausible disappointment from Hamas' failure to reach reconciliation and improve the situation (–1)	Increased support for Hamas for going with the public which demands reconciliation process and due to plausible normalization in Gaza thanks to Egyptian gestures. Potential for public criticism in case of inaction against Israel (6)	Increased internal support within the movement (rally round the flag effect) though major setback in popular support due to refusal to take part in the reconciliation. Possibility for riots (–7)	9

Religious	Refusing to cooperate with Fatah and to halt Jihad complies with Hamas' ideology (10)	Cooperating with the Fatah means joining a body allied with Israel. This is balanced by refusal to halt Jihad or to actually sign the agreement (3)	Agreeing to cooperate with secular and Israel's ally Fatah contradicts the religious ideology (−7)	Refusing to cooperate with Fatah and to halt Jihad complies with Hamas' ideology. however, a clash with Fatah might cause *Fitna* (civil war, vehemently forbidden by the Koran) (−3)	8
Strategic	Maintain military strength, but potential need to restrain more protesters in Gaza (4)	Maintain military strength, but potential for facing stronger opposition from Fatah and maybe even Egypt (−3)	Major drawback for military arm in the future as it has to be gradually incorporated in PA security. However, the agreement postpones the implementation of the security issues. Possible danger to military arm's integrity due to ransoms/ blood feuds from Fatah members (−8)	Initially, military apparatus will be consolidated by the conflict; possible difficulties in maintaining integrity in case of a renewed conflict with Fatah (−3)	7
Weighted total	−2.3	4.4 (max)	0.2	−12.8	

> [a]s a Palestinian resistance movement, we cannot expose Egypt to the burden or to more than it can handle now … The Palestinian people, who endured for 60 years, will be able to withstand another 5 or 10 years and can wait for a powerful Egyptian recovery, which will in turn lead to the rise of the entire Islamic world, not only Palestine.
>
> (Egypt Independent 2011)

While Egypt implied that it was willing to change its stance regarding Gaza, it made it clear that a new border would be contingent upon reconciliation (Crisis Group Middle East Report N°110 2011). Rejection of an agreement in which the new Egyptian regime was highly invested would have negative ramifications for future relations between the state and Hamas. Furthermore, Mashal could not afford a situation in which Hamas was perceived by the new regime as less cooperative than Fatah.

In terms of the balance of powers between Fatah and Hamas, we suggest that any agreement between the two would have benefited Hamas more than Fatah, and that Mashal was completely aware of this. While the PA and Fatah had already gained legitimacy in the international arena as more moderate representatives of the Palestinian people, Hamas was still considered a terror organization. Any reconciliation would involve mutual recognition of the other party's legitimacy. In the case of Hamas, international observers might identify any gesture toward Fatah as a hopeful act of moderation. If Hamas played its card smartly, it could gain some credit and improve its international image. On the other hand, from Fatah's perspective, any rapprochement with Hamas would be perceived as radicalization and might undermine its image and reputation. The agreement also lent Israel ammunition to use against Fatah. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu called the accord "a mortal blow to peace and a big prize for terror" (Greenberg 2011). While Fatah had a lot to lose, it seemed that the agreement could only benefit Hamas and even Mashal personally—especially if it led to recognition of the organization and the new government by the international community—as it would constitute de facto recognition of Hamas' legitimacy. This gave Mashal another reason to engage in the reconciliation process, even if he had no intent to sign the agreement. Mere negotiation between the two movements would likely bring benefits to the group.

Of the two remaining alternatives, the most beneficial to the organization was to engage in reconciliation talks with no intention of signing the agreement. However, Mashal actually chose to sign the Egyptian reconciliation agreement. This decision cannot be explained by the rational model alone. The only dimension in which the maximizing alternative to engage in negotiations without signing falls short relative to the chosen alternative is the public–political dimension. This suggests that for this decision, the public–political aspect was non-compensatory for Mashal. At the time, public opinion on the Palestinian street was clearly in favor of reconciliation. The public, both in the West Bank and in Gaza, replaced protests against the "Israeli occupation" with unrest over the division within Palestinian society, which overshadowed the Palestinians' interests and damaged any efforts at resistance. The atmosphere in Gaza was particularly tense, and demonstrations often had to be broken up violently by Hamas' security forces. Going against the public consensus would have harmed the legitimacy of the Hamas regime, which would have made further violent

measures necessary to restrain the protests (Crisis Group Middle East Report N°110 2011). Mashal understood that due to public pressure, Hamas was compelled to make gestures of good will toward Fatah, in spite of the lack of trust between the two (Milton-Edwards 2013). He therefore framed the agreement in a way that promoted the organization's image, stressing that the reconciliation aimed to enable Hamas to lead "resistance in all its forms" in order to establish "a Palestinian state, independent and completely sovereign, on the lands of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with its capital, Jerusalem, without a single settler, without conceding a single inch and without conceding the right of return" (Greenberg 2011).

After framing the agreement as one that served Hamas' ideological goals, he could justify it and commit to it publicly by stating: "We are ready and we have resolved to pay any price to complete the reconciliation and turn the words into reality on the ground" (Greenberg 2011). Yet, Hamas leadership, including Mashal himself, referred to the reconciliation agreement as a strategic move and a way for Hamas to wage their rivalry with Fatah through other means (Crisis Group Middle East Report N°110 2011).

In terms of decision characteristics, Mashal's choice could be explained either by the poliheuristic theory, with both the political–organizational and public–political dimensions as non-compensatory, the EBA decision process, or a lexicographic procedure with the political–organizational dimension being seen as critical. It is worth mentioning that, regardless of the means of arriving at his decision, Mashal's choice reveals that the Religious and the Strategic aspects were both compensatory. In fact, the chosen alternative was the one with the lowest score on both dimensions.

The importance of this decision lies in the fact that it provides an example in which a terror organization, which has a dominant political dimension, would be willing, under certain conditions, to engage in negotiations that contradict its ideology. Such an organization can be expected to choose to negotiate as long as the political dimension encourages it to do so. The obvious inference to be drawn is that in order to attract Hamas to the negotiation table, political incentives must be presented.

The decision to discontinue the receipt of Iranian funds in 2011

Hamas is a political organization. It is not a business whose goal is to increase its income consistently. Therefore, financial considerations should be purely instrumental; they should serve the organization's political goals

by enabling any necessary activity for achieving its desired political outcomes. The following decision analysis will concentrate on the economic considerations of Hamas as a political organization and will examine this aspect in light of Hamas' financial relations with Iran.

Between 1993 and 2011, Hamas accepted a great deal of money from Iran. Iran's interest in increasing its influence within the Palestinian arena is clear, as it hoped to establish itself as a leading power in both the region and the Muslim world as a whole. Hamas' motivation in accepting this funding, knowing that it would increase dependence upon an external actor who was not a natural ally, is less obvious. In the religious aspect, collaboration with Shi'a Iran contradicts Hamas' Sunni identity and ideology. With respect to the political–organizational aspect, an ambitious Iran might exert more influence than Hamas—an organization with a nationalistic agenda, and not only a religious-fundamentalist one—would be willing to tolerate. Just as the very decision to accept massive funding from Iran demonstrates how political considerations can be influenced by financial factors, so does the 2012 decision to discontinue the relationship with Iran, which is explained hereafter.

Financial ties between Iran and Hamas date back to the early 1990s. At the time, Hamas suffered from limited public support in comparison with Fatah, which was engaged in the new peace process (Frisch 2007). In Hamas' eyes, the peace process threatened its strategic goals and needed to be sabotaged in any possible way, even through collaboration with Shi'a Iran, which had appointed itself head of the rejectionist camp (Karmon 1998; 2008). In October 1992, a Hamas delegation to Iran brought about the opening of a branch in Tehran and a pledge from the Iranian regime to support the organization by means of a yearly payment of US$30 million. In addition, it was agreed that thousands of Hamas activists would be trained by the Revolutionary Guards in Iran, and by Hezbollah in Lebanon (Kurz and Tal 1997).

From 1993, when Hamas decided to accept the funding from Tehran, through 2011, the movement remained consistent in its analysis of its strategic financial situation. The decision was reinforced and acknowledged by the organization's leadership on an ongoing basis. Following the 9/11 terror attacks, Hamas became increasingly dependent on Iranian economic support, as funding from the Gulf and Saudi Arabia decreased significantly. This dependence on Iran had two important ramifications for the leadership of Hamas. First, it established that Hamas and its leaders, which until then

were completely isolated in the international arena, were integral members of the Resistance Axis alongside Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. The second effect had to do with the balance of power within the Hamas leadership. It was the external leadership that handled the relations with Teheran. More specifically, Mashal himself had good personal relations with the Iranians. The external leadership in Damascus, primarily Mashal, controlled the financial resources of the movement and through them they controlled the Qassam Brigades, the Gaza-based armed wing of the movement. Controlling this faction through the Iranian capital gave Mashal leverage over the Gaza leadership and enabled him and the Damascus leadership to have the final say in Gaza (Milton-Edwards 2013).

When the Assad regime destabilized further and was hit with sanctions by the Arab League in 2011, Mashal and the rest of Hamas leaders found themselves in the midst of a conflict of interest between their commitment to the Resistance Axis and their solidarity with the anti-regime Sunni protesters. The latter were affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and backed by the general Muslim Brotherhood movement, which Hamas perceives to be its parent movement (Mohns and Bank 2012). Hamas' Political Bureau in Damascus tried to lower its profile in order to avoid taking a stand in the internal Syrian conflict, knowing that any statement on its behalf would have negative ramifications on its relations with one of the sides. The Assad regime had hosted Hamas since its expulsion from Jordan in 1999, equipped it with military aid (along with Iran), and considered it a fundamental element in both its regional calculations and the Resistance Axis. This state of affairs can explain the regime's severe frustration and anger toward Hamas leadership when the latter failed to provide the active public support that was expected in that crucial time. Mashal also knew that by publicly taking the Muslim Brotherhood's side against Assad, Hamas would lose its support from Iran, taking away Mashal's primary form of leverage: control over the movement's financial resources (Milton-Edwards 2013). This would strengthen the Gaza leadership on the expense of Mashal and the others in Damascus.

When the situation in Syria deteriorated further, it became clear that the non-interference policy would not hold for long. The weaker and crueler Assad's regime became, the harder it was for Hamas to stay in Damascus and remain affiliated with it. In the final months of 2011, Syria's isolation within the Arab world deepened to an unprecedented level as the Arab League suspended it from membership in the organization and imposed

broad sanctions (MacFarquhar and Bakri 2011). At the same time, the pressure on Hamas to take the side of the Syrian rebels increased immensely as they were publicly endorsed by the Muslim Brotherhood and its spiritual leader, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (Memri 2011). Iran, on the other hand, made it clear that the result of such an act would be the loss of its financial and military support (Issacharoff and Harel 2011). Furthermore, it was plausible that in that case Iran would have lent political, economic and military support to Hamas' Islamist rivals, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Milton-Edwards 2013).

At that point, Mashal had four alternatives regarding the financial future of the movement:

1 Do nothing in hopes that the crisis with Iran will fade; try to appease Iran by preserving low-profile activity of the few officials that are still in Damascus and make clear that Hamas takes no side in the "domestic" war in Syria.
2 Publicly reject Iranian funds and demands and look for an alternative sponsoring country (such as Egypt or Qatar).
3 Accept Iran's funds by pretending to accept its demands, but gradually abandon Syria and search for alternative funding sources.
4 Accept funding from Iran by complying with its demands regarding Syria; Hamas external leadership and the Political Bureau in particular will stay in Damascus to convey "business as usual."

As Table 8.3 indicates, the "Do nothing" alternative was rejected in the first stage since it endangered Hamas' political interests. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that this alternative presented nothing but bad possibilities for Hamas across all four dimensions. This reinforces the argument that Mashal realized that Hamas had to put together a clear policy toward Iran's demands. From the three remaining options, accepting Iranian funds by complying with its demands would have served the strategic and even political interests of Hamas. Yet, it was rejected based on the colossal damage it would have caused to the organization's image, demonstrating that the public–political dimension remained both non-compensatory for Mashal and more important than the relevant strategic considerations.

Once Mashal understood that Hamas needed to cut its financial dependency on Iran, the remaining question was whether Hamas should distance itself from Iran at once, in an attempt to maximize public credit for

its “brave” act or whether it should choose the diplomatic path, gradually disconnecting itself from Iran and taking advantage of Tehran’s support for as long as possible. Mashal chose the latter option, a choice that can be explained both by the poliheuristic theory with the political–organizational and public–political dimensions as non-compensatory and by conventional expected utility theory. Furthermore, this decision demonstrates the compensatory nature of the strategic dimension in Mashal’s eyes.

The decision to accept the final ceasefire in Operation Protective Edge in August 2014

On July 8, 2014, Israel launched Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip, in response to Hamas’ increasing rocket attacks on Israel’s cities and population. The background for the attacks was the IDF’s Operation Brother’s Keeper against Hamas in the West Bank following the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers by Hamas terrorists. Israel’s immediate goals were to stop the rocket fire from Gaza and to neutralize the threat it faced from Hamas tunnels in its territory. Over the long term, its stated goal was to achieve calm and to postpone the next expected military campaign against Hamas for as long as possible by (a) re-establishing Israeli deterrence and (b) weakening Hamas’ military force (Dekel 2014).

Table 3.8 Mashal's decision matrix for discontinuing the receipt of Iranian funds in the end of 2011

	Do nothing	*Publicly reject Iranian funds and demands and look for an alternative sponsoring country*	*Accept Iran's funds by pretending to accept its demands and search for alternative funding sources*	*Accept Iran's funds by complying with its demands*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	Maintain political integrity in the short term. Plausible danger to organizational integrity later due to Iranian frustration and growing influence of PA and/or PIJ (–2)	Damascus leadership will lose leverage over Gaza and will need to find new location for its headquarters. Yet, Leaving the Resistance Axis will break Hamas' international isolation (1)	Buying time while maintaining supremacy of the Damascus leadership over Gaza. Possible risk of conflicts within the organization (4)	Maintain Hamas organizational integrity as well supremacy of the external leadership over Gaza. Possible risk of conflicts within the organization (4)	10
Public–Political	Major setback in popular support for Hamas among Palestinians, Sunni Arabs and eventually also among the Radical Axis. Possible growing support for PA and/or PIJ (–10)	Taking a firm ideological stand will increase Hamas' support (8)	Increase in Hamas' popular support once it finally leaves Syria (5)	Major setback in popular support for Hamas among Palestinians and the Sunni Arabs in general due to its affiliation to Assad and Iran (–8)	9

Religious	Cooperation with Assad and Shi'a Iran contradicts Hamas and Sheikh Qaradawi's ideology. It is balanced with the ability to fund Jihad (−6)	Cutting relations with Assad and Iran complies with Hamas Sunni ideology (10)	Cutting relations with Assad and Iran complies with Hamas Sunni ideology (9)	Cooperation with Assad and Shi'a Iran contradicts Hamas and Sheikh Qaradawi's ideology. It is balanced with the ability to fund Jihad (−7)	8
Strategic	Maintain military integrity in the short term. Plausible danger to military integrity in the long term, when Iran will stop supporting Hamas and might increase support of PIJ (−4)	Possible major difficulties in maintaining integrity once Iran stops to fund and train the military. Iran might also support instead the military corps of PIJ (−7)	Maintain military integrity. Possible need to reduce the level of activity after Iran stops to fund and train the military. Iran might also support instead the military corps of PIJ (−4)	Maintain military strength and integrity as Iran will provide funds and training to the Qassam Brigades (6)	7
Weighted total	−18.6	11.3	12.9 (max)	−4.6	

Hamas aimed to overcome the unprecedented economic, political and military low that it had reached prior to the operation. The international isolation of the organization coupled with its efforts to prevent other factions in Gaza from firing rockets at Israel (due to fear of Israeli retaliation) damaged its image and prestige as the leader of the Palestinian resistance. Meanwhile, Egypt declared Hamas a terror organization, restricted access to the Rafah crossing and rendered Hamas unable to pay salaries to its people by destroying its tunnels. Thus, both economic distress within Gaza and public criticism against Hamas mounted simultaneously (Schweitzer 2014).

Hamas saw the military option as an opportunity to improve its overall situation. The campaign was intended to increase international pressure on Israel to lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip and to release Hamas' people, who were arrested during the crackdown in the West Bank. The organization hoped to restore both its image and military prestige, as well as to divert the attention from the domestic crisis within the strip (Dekel 2014; Schweitzer 2014).

During the operation, most of the rockets fired by Hamas were intercepted by the Iron Dome system. Yet, in addition to the rockets, Hamas' offensive involved measures and methods of operation that it had not used before—such as infiltration from the sea—and measures that had only been used on a smaller scale in the past—as was the case with the attack tunnels, used against both military forces and the Israeli population within Israeli territory. In response, Israel expanded the operation to a ground invasion of Gaza in order to destroy Hamas' tunnel system. Israeli ground forces withdrew on August 5, but the armed conflict lasted 7 weeks until a ceasefire was announced on August 26 (King and Sobelman 2014; Sherwood and Balousha 2014). According to IDF reports, by that date over 4,560 rockets and mortars had been fired from Gaza, over 5,260 targets in Gaza had been attacked by the IDF and at least 32 tunnels had been destroyed. Additionally, nearly two-thirds of Hamas' 10,000-rocket arsenal was used up or destroyed. Israel suffered 74 dead, with around 2,200 killed on the Palestinian side. Prior to the final open-ended ceasefire, there were 11 humanitarian ceasefires or attempts to reach ceasefires, all of which were violated or rejected by Hamas (Dekel 2014; ICT 2014).

The final ceasefire was based on an Egyptian proposal that had been accepted by Israel in a much earlier stage, but was decisively rejected by Hamas since it included none of Hamas' declared conditions for ending the fighting (such as allowing the construction of an airport and a seaport in Gaza, fully opening all the crossings into Gaza, releasing Palestinian prisoners, and the receipt of money for Hamas' payroll). Before Hamas eventually capitulated and accepted the Egyptian proposal, it strove to force Israel to accept a rival proposal presented by Qatar, which included most of its terms. According to the Egyptian ceasefire proposal, which had no time limit, both sides were to halt all attacks on each other immediately. Israel was to open the crossings to the Gaza Strip to allow entry of humanitarian aid and reconstruction supplies under Israeli supervision. Gaza's fishing zone was to be extended to six nautical miles. And indirect negotiations over other topics were to start within a month (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014; Issacharoff 2014).

The following analysis examines Mashal's decision to accept the Egyptian proposal for ceasefire on August 26. As in past opportunities for ceasefires, the alternatives that faced Mashal included:

1 Do nothing: continue to fight without engaging in talks regarding a ceasefire.
2 Engage in negotiations on ceasefire while clinging to the Qatari framework: as the Qatari plan was unacceptable by Israel, the odds of reaching an agreement were clearly low. Yet, any negotiations might buy Hamas some time and international credit.
3 Sign a ceasefire agreement based on the Egyptian framework in order to buy time, with no intention of respecting it.
4 Sign a final ceasefire agreement based on the Egyptian framework and respect it.

Israel's guidelines regarding the desired terms for a ceasefire and an end-state for the military campaign were: (1) to Weaken Hamas and deter it for as long as possible from renewing the rocket fire and terror acts against Israel; (2) to hold Hamas responsible (avoid the collapse of its rule) for everything happening in Gaza, without officially recognizing its legitimacy; and (3) to make sure that Hamas would have no concrete achievements by the end of the campaign. Israel was willing to conduct a war of attrition until its terms for a ceasefire were met.

Hamas, on the contrary, was fighting for its survival and ability to govern Gaza. Therefore, it strove to stretch the campaign until it could present any achievement whatsoever. This was vital for the organization to maintain its power. For that reason, Mashal seemed to estimate that the expected loss of halting the fighting without achieving any of Hamas' demands would be greater than what could be expected if the fighting continued. Furthermore, he honestly thought that Hamas could eventually force Israel to a ceasefire under its terms. It seems that Israel's signals that it did not seek to topple Hamas' rule, along with its willingness to accept Egypt's ceasefire proposal at a rather early stage, were misinterpreted by Mashal as signs that Israel was nearing its breaking point. He concluded that continuing the fighting was in Hamas' best interest in order to maximize its leverage in the negotiations for the end-state. It took time for Hamas' leadership to become fully aware of the standing power of Israel, which was backed by Egypt, and to realize that the continuation of the war was actually contrary to the organization's interest (Dekel 2014). The organization's leadership in Gaza, headed by Ismail Haniyeh, reached this conclusion faster than did Mashal, who was based in Qatar and didn't experience firsthand the suffering and distress of the Gazans. In addition, it took the final few days' escalations in the

destinations of Israel's attacks (bombing high-rises in Gaza and targeted killing of senior figures from Hamas' military wing) in order for Mashal to become convinced that it was time to accept the Egyptian ceasefire proposal that he had previously rejected.

Looking at the matrix in Table 3.9, the negative final scores of the first three alternatives clearly demonstrate that, despite the fact that Hamas didn't reach the desired end-state after 50 days of war, the rational choice was to accept the Egyptian offer for a ceasefire before Hamas reached a point of no return, in both political and military terms. While Mashal's final decision can be explained by a purely rational approach, it can also follow from a poliheuristic Decision Code, with both the political–organizational and public–political dimensions as non-compensatory dimensions. If indeed the poliheuristic theory was applied, it would suggest that the religious dimension was compensatory for Mashal.

Once Mashal acknowledged the Egyptian offer as the only relevant alternative, he realized that he could not affect the terms of the ceasefire. Thus, he focused on the attempt to present the campaign publicly as a win for Hamas. In his "victory speech" in Qatar, on August 28, he said: "This is not the end. This was not the last campaign to liberate Palestine – it was an important stop on the road to victory," And he emphasized what he could market as achievements: "They hit our airport, we hit their airport; they hit us deep within our territory, we hit them deep within their territory; their missiles reach everyone in Gaza, we have reached across Israel. More than five million Israelis were in shelters" (Levi 2014; Schweitzer 2014).

The decision to permit limited cooperation with the Islamic State in Sinai 2015

There is a deep ideological gap between the ISIS and Hamas. Even though both are Sunni Jihadist terror organizations, ISIS leads the Salafi Jihadist camp, while Hamas is affiliated with the rival, non-Salafi, Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, following Hamas' attempts to crack down on Salafi cells within the Gaza Strip, it was ruled by ISIS to be an infidel organization (Batrawi 2015; Booth and Raghavan 2016).

Yet, during the second half of 2015 there were more than a few cases of limited cooperation in the Sinai Peninsula between Hamas and the ISIS Sinai Province (also called Wilayat Sinai). The collaboration, which evolved mostly at the operational level, included the smuggling of weapons, goods,

terrorists and more. Hamas has claimed to fundamentally oppose Salafi Jihadism and has consistently denied any connection to Wilayat Sinai, just as it rejected the notion of Wilayat Sinai's military chief, Shadi Al-Menai's, secret visit in Gaza for talks with Hamas' military wing (Yaari 2015). Yet, both Israeli and Egyptian intelligence services publicly accused Hamas figures of traveling to Sinai in order to conduct mutual training with Wilayat Sinai and even assist them in attacks against the Egyptian security forces (Booth and Raghavan 2016; The Tower.org staff 2016). At the same time, figures from Wilayat Sinai reportedly crossed into Gaza for medical purposes and to seek shelter from Egyptian security forces (Berti and Gold 2016; Wilson 2016).

Table 3.9 Mashal's decision matrix for accepting the final ceasefire in Operation Protective Edge in August 2014

	Do nothing (fight without engaging talks regarding a ceasefire)	*Engage negotiations on ceasefire but cling to the Qatari framework to which Israel resolutely opposed*	*Sign a ceasefire agreement based on the Egyptian framework with no intention to respect it*	*Sign a final ceasefire agreement based on the Egyptian framework and respect it*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	Possible major difficulties in maintaining organizational integrity due to the escalation in Israel's attacks (–5)	Initially, maintaining organizational integrity by buying some time; Possible major difficulties in maintaining organizational integrity due to renewal of the conflict (–3)	Initially, buying time and strengthening organizational integrity and image by gaining international credit for accepting ceasefire; Possible major difficulties in maintaining organizational integrity due to the renewal of the conflict with Israel + decrease in international support due to lack of credibility (1)	Waiver all of Hamas' original demands. Yet, maintain organizational integrity by removing Israeli threat and gaining some international support and legitimacy for stopping the violence (3)	10
Public–Political	Initially, increase in popular support for Hamas due to "rally round the flag" effect; then decrease in support due to the death toll and humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip (–5)	Initially, increase in popular support for Hamas due to "rally round the flag" effect and its firm ideological stand; then decrease in support due to the death toll and humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip (–4)	Initially, increase in popular support for Hamas for reaching the much-needed relief and expected aid. Plausible major frustration due to renewal of the conflict (2)	None of Hamas' stated demands is fulfilled in this agreement, yet the ceasefire will enable to start the restoration of the Gaza Strip (3)	9

Religious	Complies with the principles of the Hamas Charter (10)	Negotiating a ceasefire with Israel is a contradiction to the religious ideology. This is balanced with the renewal of the armed struggle (–4)	Negotiating a ceasefire with Israel is a contradiction to the religious ideology. This is balanced with the renewal of the armed struggle (–4)	Negotiating a ceasefire with Israel is a contradiction to the religious ideology (–10)	8
Strategic	Restore Hamas' military prestige; erosion of military resources; possible major difficulties in maintaining integrity due to Israel's attacks (–7)	Restore Hamas' military prestige; erosion of military resources; possible major difficulties in maintaining integrity due to Israel's attacks (–7)	Restore Hamas' military prestige; erosion of military resources; possible major difficulties in maintaining integrity due to Israel's attacks (–4)	A ceasefire will enable to start the much-needed restoration of the armed forces (5)	7
Weighted total	–6.4	–14.7	–3.2	1.2 (max)	

Since reports emphasized the local and operational nature of the cooperation, mainly with the military wing of Hamas in Gaza, it might be a stretch to credit the initiative to collaborate with Wilayat Sinai to Mashal himself. Yet, even if the decision was driven by the military wing or other factors in the organization, it is unlikely that it took place without Mashal's approval. This is especially likely given its longevity and the intensive coverage it received from the local and international media.

Even before Operation Protective Edge, and surely thereafter, both the Gaza economy and Hamas depended on an "informal tunnel economy." In addition to goods, medical supplies, construction materials and fuel, it provided the Hamas government with "tax" revenue and the military wing with weapons and cash. Preserving the few tunnels that survived Egypt's aggressive flooding and sealing campaign, and securing the smuggling lines to and from Sinai became essential to Hamas' survival and hence, a top priority for the organization (Khoury 2015).

At the same time, due to its fragile position and isolation, Hamas' interest was to avoid any further confrontation with Egypt or Israel (both of which were going through an ongoing wave of violent clashes with Palestinians at the time). For this reason, Hamas refrained from renewing the rocket fire

from Gaza into Israel and even cracked down on independent rebellious elements. Yet, amid reported growing support in Gaza for an armed Intifada and 10 percent of the population being pro-ISIS, Hamas became concerned that its "moderation" would generate a backlash and even defection by radical military elements to the Salafi Jihadi camp (Berti and Gold 2016).

The following analysis focuses on Mashal's decision to accept limited collaboration in the Sinai with Wilayat Sinai, the leading organization of the very ideological camp that Hamas had tried to eradicate within the Gaza Strip. His alternatives in this case were:

1 Do nothing: avoid any collaboration with Salafi militants in Sinai.
2 Collaborate with Wilayat Sinai behind the scenes, yet publicly deny any connection to the Salafi organization.
3 Publicly collaborate with Wilayat Sinai.
4 Actively turn against Wilayat Sinai and the Salafi factions in Gaza, in an attempt to gain credit from Egypt, which could be leveraged to break the political and international isolation of Hamas.

While Hamas wished to prevent any ISIS-inspired elements from operating in Gaza, it has tended to show more restraint toward Wilayat Sinai, even collaborating with the organization (BBC Monitoring 2016). The ongoing economic crisis, political isolation, internal unrest and the Egyptian effort to seal the border through the destruction of the tunnels combined to provide an incentive for Hamas (and its armed wing in particular) to cooperate with the ideological rival from across the border. What started as a transaction-based relationship with Wilayat Sinai for providing Hamas with the military and financial resources that it lacked, resulted in a growing ad-hoc cooperation aimed to ensure that Hamas' "lifeline" passage remained clear (Yaari 2015; Berti and Gold 2016).

As Table 3.10 indicates, although the cooperation in question was temporary and driven by economic concerns, it still cannot be explained by rational choice alone, since the alternative chosen was not utility maximizing. Consequently, our analysis suggests that it was either a poliheuristic or EBA decision rule (with emphasis on the political–organizational and public–political dimensions) that led Mashal to choose to enter into limited, confidential cooperation with Wilayat Sinai.

In the first stage Mashal ruled out the options to "Do nothing" and to "Publicly collaborate with Wilayat Sinai" due to his loss aversion on the

political–organizational and public–political dimensions. Each of these alternatives would do devastating damage to Hamas' image and political survival. The choice to "Do nothing" would mean preserving the unbearable distress in Gaza and allowing the existing tensions between Hamas' political and military wings to continue in a way that might encourage defection from Hamas to pro-ISIS elements in Gaza or even in Sinai. In contrast, the opposite radical option of colluding with Wilayat Sinai publicly would have equally devastating ramifications for Hamas governance. In addition to the double front that Israel and Egypt would be likely to open against Hamas, endorsing ISIS publicly is probably the only act that would have significantly deepened Hamas' isolation in the Muslim world as ISIS is enemy to all of Hamas' patrons: the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran and Qatar. Mashal, who is personally connected to all three could not afford to take responsibility for such an action. On the other hand, a limited, secret, ad-hoc cooperation on the operational level, led by the organization's military wing, would provide Mashal with plausible deniability, allowing him simply to turn a blind eye. After all, Hamas in Gaza has been dependent for years upon different elements within the Sinai Peninsula, including criminals, to aid in smuggling weapons and other goods. Last but not least, during the year 2015, ISIS became a synonym for inhumane cruelty as its terrifying terror activity received intense coverage in both traditional and social media. Hamas could not afford to align itself with such horrors, as that would have critically damaged its image and legitimacy as the representative of the Islamic Palestinian resistance, both in the eyes of the Palestinian street and in the eyes of the international community.

In the second stage, the two remaining alternatives provided a sufficient political payoff but differed on their expected utility along the strategic and religious dimensions. "Actively turn against Wilayat Sinai and the Salafi factions in Gaza" complied with Hamas' religious ideology and likely have earned Hamas significant credit in the eyes of Egypt and the rest of the Sunni world. Yet, it could potentially cause major damage to Hamas' military assets from possible retaliations as well as the halt of weapon smugglings and military build-up of the organization. The last alternative, "Collaborate with Wilayat Sinai, yet publicly deny it" bluntly contradicted Hamas' religious ideology, yet it provided the organization with a solution to its military needs. Overall, the expected benefits of turning against Wilayat Sinai outweighed those of secretly collaborating with it. Yet, Mashal chose the latter alternative. Once again, this decision implies that the religious

dimension is compensatory for Mashal. On the other hand, this decision provides some evidence that the strategic dimension was non-compensatory for Mashal during this period. A possible explanation could be that in this case, the disagreements between Hamas' political and military wings might have fractured the organizational integrity of Hamas due to defections from the military wing and other security forces. Therefore, maintaining military–strategic interests became a crucial political priority as well.

Table 3.10 Mashal's decision matrix for permitting a limited cooperation with Wilayat Sinai

	Do nothing	*Collaborate with Wilayat Sinai, yet publicly deny it*	*Publicly collaborate with Wilayat Sinai*	*Actively turn against Wilayat Sinai and the Salafi factions in Gaza*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	Possible danger to organizational integrity in case local elements in Gaza would prefer to cooperate independently with Salafi elements in Sinai (–3(	Gaining control and leverage over Salafi elements in Gaza. Possible danger to organizational integrity in case of retaliation from Egypt (1)	Danger to organizational integrity in case of retaliation from Egypt. Plausible crisis with Iran and perhaps also with Qatar. Israel and the West will use this to further delegitimize Hamas. More control/leverage over Salafi elements in Gaza (–7)	Possible danger to organizational integrity due to retaliation from Wilayat Sinai and possibly from Salafi elements in Gaza. Yet, significant increase in international credit and prestige and possibly an end to Hamas' isolation (3)	10
Public–Political	Setback in popular support for Hamas as the economic crisis remains (–3)	Smugglings will enable the Gaza economy to keep afloat and the denial of the collaboration will allow Hamas to take the credit (3)	Smugglings will enable the Gaza economy to keep afloat. Yet, a major setback in popular support for Hamas is expected from the majority of Palestinians, which oppose IS. Moreover, this will increase the legitimacy of Salafi elements in Gaza (–7)	Possible setback in popular support for Hamas as the economic crisis remains. This might be balanced with credit Hamas will gain for actively opposing Wilayat Sinai (–1)	9

Religious	Refusing to collaborate with Wilayat Sinai complies with the ideology of Hamas. Possible decrease of Jihad (6)	Being in collusion with Salafi Wilayat Sinai contradicts Hamas' ideology. This is slightly balanced with the public denial and the renewal of military assets that will enable Jihad (–7)	Being in collusion with Salafi Wilayat Sinai contradicts Hamas' ideology. This is slightly balanced with the renewal of military assets that will enable Jihad (–8)	Complies with the principles of Hamas' charter (10)	8
Strategic	Damages Hamas' military strength as the smuggling activity will severely decrease. Salafi militants in Gaza might gain power on Hamas' expense (–8)	Enables smuggling of weapons and mutual training. Possible retaliation from Egypt and even Israel (7)	Enables smuggling of weapons and mutual training. Very plausible retaliation from Egypt and even Israel (6)	Difficulties in smuggling weapons and renewing Hamas' build-up efforts. Possible damage to military assets due to retaliation from Wilayat Sinai (–7)	7
Weighted total	–6.5	3	–15.5	5.2 (max)	

The decision to publish Hamas' new policy document in May 2017

In a press conference held in Doha on May 1, 2017, Khaled Mashal introduced Hamas' new policy document. The document was not intended to replace the organization's 1988 founding charter, but to complement it with a 42-article updated review of Hamas' principles and objectives. The timing of the document's unveiling was not random—it occurred shortly after Haniyeh's election as head of the organization's Political Bureau and just 2 days prior to Abu Mazen's meeting with President Trump in Washington. Mashal saw the document both as a personal opportunity to leave his mark on the organization before retiring, and as an opportunity for Hamas to challenge Fatah's traditional control over the PLO and the Palestinian arena as a whole.

The new policy document differs from the original charter in several ways. The most noteworthy distinction is found in the clear shift of its focus away from the religious–Islamic aspect and toward the national–Palestinian

component. More generally, the document emphasizes the political rather than the religious contexts of both the organization and the conflict. Unlike the 1988 charter, the current document does not mention Hamas' affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood and the dominant Islamic and anti-Jewish nature of the original charter has been refined with a more conciliatory message: Hamas is not hostile toward Jews or Judaism, but opposes only to the "Zionist Project." Another new concept is the willingness to accept the borders of June 4, 1967 as a basis for an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital (Al Jazeera 2017; MEE staff 2017). All of these declarations appear to be part of an attempt to "rebrand" Hamas and present it as a legitimate political actor in the Palestinian and international arenas. The document, in its final version, is the result of at least 2 years of intensive deliberations within Hamas' leadership. It was designed to present Hamas' ability to learn and adapt to changes within Palestinian society, the Arab world, and the broader international arena that had occurred since the organization's establishment (Dekel 2017).

Yet, Hamas and Mashal himself emphasized the organization's ideological commitment to the original charter, whose principles have been revalidated and reinforced through the publication of the new and more politically oriented document. Thus, Hamas refuses to recognize Israel and its right to exist, and remains devoted to armed resistance, to Jihad, and to the right of return (MEE staff 2017). In this context, it is worth mentioning that Hamas attempts to walk a fine line between its more moderate and pragmatic elements and its hardliners. This has resulted in a vague formulation that consists of more than a few internal contradictions. For example, it states that a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders is "a formula of national consensus," but continues by declaring that "Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea" and demands that all refugees shall return to their homes (Dekel 2017; MEE staff 2017). In his speech at Doha, Mashal reaffirmed: "We shall not waive an inch of the Palestinian home soil" (Al Jazeera 2017).

This analysis looks at Mashal's decision to publish Hamas' new policy document, given the alternatives he faced at the time:

1 Do nothing: publish no new document and avoid any remarks regarding Hamas' original charter.
2 Cling to the principles of the original charter and reinforce them either by republishing the original charter or by publishing a new document

that emphasizes these principles.

3 Publish a new policy document that slightly refines the original charter, yet does not replace it.

4 Acknowledge the State of Israel (in the 1967 borders) by either updating the original charter or publishing a new document that will replace it.

A brief examination of Mashal's alternatives regarding a possible update of the organization's positions, given in Table 3.11, clearly shows that the option of "Recognizing the State of Israel" was the worst for Hamas at the time. Despite the significant international credit that it could have earned the organization, it would have damaged Hamas in all other aspects, including the political–organizational and the public–political, to which Mashal is especially sensitive. For this reason, this alternative was ruled out by Mashal during the first stage. Of the three remaining alternatives, a purely rational choice would have resulted in "Cling to the Principles of the original charter and reinforce them," which provided the highest total benefit. Yet, Mashal refused this option due to its negative ramifications on the political–organizational dimension, which he views as non-compensatory. After ruling out these two alternatives, Mashal was left with two options that were satisfactory in terms of his non-compensatory dimensions. The first was to publish a new, refined policy document, which would significantly increase Hamas' popular support both among the Palestinian society and in the international community (Dekel 2017). The second was not to update or even republish the existing charter (Do nothing). Though doing nothing would not generate any popular support, it was more favorable to Hamas' interests on the religious and strategic dimensions than publishing a new document is. Yet Mashal's final choice was to publish a new policy document, resulting from a poliheuristic decision process and indicating that he is indeed more sensitive to the public–political ramifications of his decisions and that the religious dimension is compensatory from his point of view.

Table 3.11 Mashal's decision matrix for publishing a new policy document

	Do nothing	*Cling to the Principles of the original charter and reinforce them*	*Publish a new policy document which slightly refines the original charter, yet does not replace it*	*Recognizing the State of Israel (update the original charter or publishing a new alternative document)*	*Weight*
Political–Organizational	No discernible effect on the inner-organizational dimension (0)	Maintain Hamas organizational integrity, plausible condemnations that will deepen its international political isolation (−1)	Maintain Hamas organizational integrity and gain international credit for moderation and pragmatism. Possible criticism on the level of authenticity of the change (5)	Possible difficulties in maintaining organizational integrity due to internal and Iranian opposition. This might be balanced with considerable gain of international credit and major embarrassment to Israel (0)	10
Public–Political	No discernible effect on the public support for Hamas (0)	Limited increase in popular support due to the organization's consistency and relevancy (2)	Possible increase in popular support within Palestinian society and abroad, for staying relevant and demonstrating pragmatism (5)	Possible limited increase in popular support for promoting Hamas relevancy to the conflict's resolution. Major setback in popular support due to loss of the leadership of the resistance (−4)	9
Religious	Complies with the ideology of Hamas (9)	Revalidates the ideology of Hamas (10)	Undermine the original charter's principles and emphasize on the national rather than the Religious aspects the ideology (−1)	Contradicts the Jihad principle (−10)	8
Strategic	Maintain Hamas military strength (2)	Maintain Hamas military strength and possible increase in the prestige of the military wing (4)	Maintain Hamas military strength. Despite the moderation aspect, the document will reinforce the need of armed resistance (1)	Major drawback for military arm as the concept of armed resistance will become less relevant (−9)	7
Weighted total	8.6	11.6 (max)	9.4	−17.9	

Overall, the new document provides a review of Hamas' so-called updated positions, but does not reverse the principles of its original charter, to which remains fully committed. It appears that the main objective was to

improve Hamas' image by portraying it in its current phase as a pragmatic and relevant Palestinian nationalist organization. To this end, the new document shifts the center of gravity from Islamic components in the charter to Palestinian nationalism. This is reflected, for example, in Hamas' desire to detach itself from the Muslim Brotherhood by redefining itself simply as an Islamic national movement (Dekel 2017).

The document does not seem to present a genuine and significant change in the mindset or ideology of Hamas, as it is too vague and full of internal contradictions at this point. Yet, whether it is the result of an authentic minor shift in the organization's perception or a cynical attempt to market itself and improve its problematic image and state of isolation, the decision to publish the new document under its current formulation can shed light on: (1) Hamas' lessons from its experiences and challenges in the past decade, including the operational need to balance between ideology and politics; (2) the organization's deep commitment to its ideology on the one hand, and its willingness to take pragmatic measures and "compromise" on intermediate states in order to promote its desired end-state on the other; and (3) how the organization perceives the gaps between its ideology and what the Arab and Western world expect it to change in order to be considered as a relevant and legitimate national party that can represent the Palestinians in the international arena.

Conclusion

Table 3.12 summarizes Khaled Mashal's decisions. He tends to act primarily as pragmatic decision-maker that responds to changes in the political environment surrounding him (Mishal and Sela 2000). Across time, he has generally been most sensitive to losses on the organizational–political dimension. Yet he has also found the public perception of Hamas to be a crucial component of his decision process. Moreover, our analysis shows that Israel's disengagement strategy (the withdrawal from Gaza) has accelerated a course of increased political participation and orientation on the part of the movement's leaders. This change is similar to the marked increased importance of Hezbollah on the Lebanese political scene, in comparison to its previous focus on the armed struggle with Israel.

Table 3.12 Summary of Mashal's Decision Codes in the ten analyzed decisions

Decision/Code		*Rational*	*Poliheuristic*	*EBA*
1	Accepting "Hudna" in Cairo in 2005		✓	✓
2	Participating in the 2006 PLC elections	✓	✓	
3	Kidnapping of Gilad Shalit in 2006	✓	✓	✓
4	Compromising during the November 2006 crisis in Hamas leadership	✓	✓	
5	Breaking the "Tahdiya" in 2008	✓	✓	✓
6	Signing the Cairo Agreement in May 2011		✓	✓
7	Cutting finance dependency in Iran in the end of 2011	✓	✓	
8	Signing on the Egyptian ceasefire proposal in Operation Protective Edge, in August 2014	✓	✓	
9	Entering a limited cooperation with the Islamic State's Sinai Province in late 2015		✓	✓
10	Publishing the "new policy document" of Hamas in May 2017		✓	
	Total	**6**	**10**	**5**

Prior to the 2006 elections, Abu Mazen convinced both American and Israeli statesmen that the political process would transform Hamas into a more pragmatic, politically oriented actor (see Herzog 2006). However, it seems that, contrary to his claim, Hamas' involvement in the political process did not stem from a willingness to end the armed struggle. Rather, our analysis clearly indicates that Mashal views the political path as the best way to minimize dangers to the organization itself, especially to its ability to deploy and use armed force, while remaining true to its founding principles and continuing the armed struggle against Israel.

Mashal made his decisions in hopes to maintain the armed brigades as a powerful tool to influence Palestinian affairs in the long run. His decision to participate in the 2006 elections reflects this desire—political legitimacy and influence are seen as a means of keeping the Hamas organizational body

(charity institutions, schools and mosques, and terrorist cells) intact while the PA is gaining strength. Previously, the movement put an emphasis on other policy items—such as entering the *hudna* agreement with Fatah in 2005—in order to achieve the same goal. Hamas' identity as a militant, operative political force is clearly one that the movement's leadership is keen on maintaining. Therefore, Mashal can be expected to resist any attempt to force the organization to disarm, either by military or political–parliamentary methods.

Policy-makers in Israel and in the international community might be able to influence Hamas into further temporary peace agreements by creating a sense of threat to Hamas' integrity if it refuses to sit at the negotiations table and instead opts to renew the armed struggle. Such a sense of threat could be produced in Mashal's successors by firm and resolute declarations and actions against Hamas if it does not comply, thus creating a "cognitive shortcut" that coerces Hamas leaders into choosing the more "peaceful" alternatives in order to minimize the risk to the movement's organizational dimension.

1 This is a significantly expanded version of a chapter published by Friedman et al. in Mintz and Adamsky.

2 Although Hamas perceives itself as part of the wider Islamic movement across the Arab world, its behavior and the writings of its leaders in the years of its existence clearly indicate that the most important scene in its eyes is the Palestinian, and it sees itself first, clearly, and primarily as a national Palestinian movement. See, for example, Mishal and Sela 1999.

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4 Between limited war and strategic build-up

An analysis of Hassan Nasrallah's decision pattern

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Introduction

This chapter uses the Applied Decision Analysis (ADA) procedure to describe and analyze the sequence of decisions made by one of the most prominent and longest-reigning leaders of a terrorist organization, Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah. Nasrallah has led the organization for the last quarter of a century. It is interesting to note that during the period of time analyzed in this chapter, in spite of relatively frequent challenges of varying nature and characteristics, Nasrallah's decision pattern has remained relatively stable. In this chapter, we specifically consider the following 14 decisions made between 2000 and 2015:

1 Nasrallah's decision to fight following Israeli withdrawal (2000)
2 Nasrallah's decision to aid the Palestinians (October 2000)
3 Nasrallah's decision not to become involved in Iraq (2003)
4 Nasrallah's decision to continue conflict following Syrian withdrawal (2005)
5 Nasrallah's decision to increase the campaign against Israel (2006)

6 Nasrallah’s hypothetical decision matrix (no Israeli attack) (2006)
7 Nasrallah’s decision on the lack of overt reaction following the assassination of Imad Mughnieh (2008)
8 Nasrallah’s decision on the establishment of a Hezbollah network in Egypt (2005–2008)
9 Nasrallah’s decision to deepen Hezbollah military activity in Southern Lebanon (2009)
10 Nasrallah’s decision on indirect intervention in Syria (2011–2012)
11 Nasrallah’s decision to attack Israelis at Burgas, Bulgaria (2012)
12 Nasrallah’s decision on direct limited intervention in Syria (2013)
13 Nasrallah’s decision on indirect intervention in Syria (2015)
14 Nasrallah’s decision to respond moderately after the Israeli attack (2015)

Hassan Nasrallah has analyzed his changing political and strategic environment after each event, and made “tactical” decisions, which influenced subsequent situations to a relatively limited extent. This was necessary given the volatile political environment Hezbollah encountered in the latter half of 2000. We analyze each of these multiple and sequential decisions to approximate Nasrallah’s decision profile. The subsequent tactical “tweaks” implemented by the leader give us further insight into his decision calculus. Furthermore, by analyzing the two separate stages of the decision (the initial choice, and the subsequent tweak), we demonstrate another way in which the ADA method can be used to understand how terrorist leaders make decisions, especially those whose decisions correspond readily to a two-stage implementation. As with our analyses of previous leaders, by uncovering Nasrallah’s decision pattern, we are able to provide analysts with a valuable tool for interpreting, and even predicting, a far-reaching array of decisions and policy courses taken by Hezbollah in the broader context of the last 6 years and within the foreseeable future. For example, the reaction of Hezbollah to various Israeli and US courses of action concerning its armaments and operational capabilities can be predicted using insights obtained from ADA.

It is well known that in the face of the many options and alternatives with which Nasrallah was presented in the year following the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May 2000, he repeatedly chose to act in order to propagate one of two goals: 1) continue the armed struggle, in a limited and covert way, and 2) build and strengthen Hezbollah’s strategic military arm,

consisting of a considerable corps of trained warriors, mid-range artillery and Katyusha rockets, and advanced long-range capabilities (e.g., Iranian and Syrian long-range rockets and SA-18 anti-aircraft missiles).

The decisions made by Nasrallah following the Israeli withdrawal through the renewed conflict in 2006 have remained consistent in spite of several opportunities, challenges and considerable changes in the "strategic environment" of the organization. The bombing of the Twin Towers (2001), the upsurge of Lebanese nationalism following the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and withdrawal of Syrian forces (2005) and the upcoming elections in Lebanon, were all events which might have influenced the way Nasrallah perceived his alternatives in this span of time. However, Nasrallah has been consistent in his decision to focus on Israel and strengthen his organization, and all his activities and policy decisions since then seem to comply with this initial perception of reality.

We begin by drawing Hezbollah's "organizational" goals, which we perceive to be a permanent structure in which Nasrallah operates as leader, and then proceed to analyze the specific modifications Nasrallah's influence makes on this structure. Nasrallah's influence on the conceptual structure of the organization will be analyzed using the ADA method.

Our first task is to analyze Hezbollah and to determine its primary goals. We then look at Nasrallah specifically, in order to construct his personal decision matrix. Using the matrix to analyze his choices will then allow us to determine the critical dimension(s) that influence Nasrallah's decisions.

Hezbollah

Understanding Hezbollah—literally, the "Party of God"—in all its dimensions is a challenging task for analysts and researchers. This is due to the special nature of this organization. Not unlike the Palestinian Hamas, Hezbollah has simultaneously adopted the characteristics of several different political phenomena. It is part-political party and social movement, part-armed national liberation movement, part-local Lebanese fundamentalist Islamic movement, and part-global fundamentalist Islamic (Shi'ite) terrorist force, on par with bin Laden's (Sunni) al-Qaeda network. Not surprisingly, Nasrallah's "number two" in Hezbollah's military branch, Imad Mughniya, appears on the list of 22 most wanted terrorists issued by President Bush following the 9/11 attacks.[1] Ultimately, Hezbollah is a three-pronged

organization: it is political, nationalistic and religious–fundamentalist. Understanding the organization requires an exploration of each of these three components.

The political dimension

Since 1992, Hezbollah has taken part in the political process in Lebanon, with its representatives standing for popular election in various districts across the country. This was the final step in an inner debate within Hezbollah on the question of "Lebanonization," or "opening-up" (*infitah*) to Lebanese public affairs and politics, a process that Nasrallah strongly supported. Today, Hezbollah is the main political representative for the Shi'ite population, a large minority, which comprises 40 percent of the Lebanese population (Moubayed 2005). This position was hard earned through both political and violent struggles, and through Hezbollah's extensive charity and education programs for its Shi'ite constituency (Post 2007). Hezbollah is faced with all of the classic challenges of ethno-religious parties in a pluralist system. Those characteristics are exacerbated in the Lebanese system, in which ethnic clashes have emphasized the frailty of the present constitution, which is based on an exact balance between the various ethnical groups in the country (Shi'ites, Sunnis, different Christian creeds, Druze and Palestinians).

The nationalist dimension

The roots of Hezbollah are in the popular resentment and disaffection of the Lebanese, primarily the Shi'ite, population with the Israeli intervention and occupation that started in 1982. This dimension drew a considerable amount of the organization's energy, resources and manpower. Between 1982 and 2000, Hezbollah became the leading and most active anti-Israeli armed resistance organization in Lebanon. Today, it is virtually the only Lebanese armed resistance group with substantial operational capabilities. Hezbollah's nationalistic dimension, therefore, consists of the goals and interests of Hezbollah as a military organization fighting Israel. Prior to the retreat in 2000, Nasrallah clearly stated that

> as for Israel, in our opinion and planning it will remain an illegal entity, illegitimate, temporary, and cancerous … therefore we will join with

> other elements opposed to normalization with this entity since the struggle against normalization would hinder Israel's transformation into a regional superpower.
>
> (Sobelman 2004, 29)

Even after the Israeli retreat, the "Zionist entity" is perceived as a threat to Lebanon's security and peace, as Hezbollah views it.

This outlook is of course compliant with the Iranian official and Islamic fundamentalist views, but it is rooted deeply in Arab nationalistic political perception, and cannot be considered a mere "import" from Teheran. Since the beginning of the Zionist project in Palestine, Arab states and national movements have viewed it as a threat on various levels, even before the rise of Islamic fundamentalism with the 1979 revolution (consider, for example, the Baath party and Nasserist reactions to Israel during the 1960s and 1970s).

The religious–fundamentalist dimension

This dimension contains the set of implications for the ethno-religious ideological content of Hezbollah's actions. Hezbollah is part of the Iranian attempt to "export the revolution" begun by Khomeini in 1979. As such, it represents the inner-Islamic drive to the unification of all Muslims under the rule of the Ayatollas (*Willayat el-Faqih*). This ideological driving force behind the organization has a meaning on a broader stage than Lebanon or even the Middle East (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002). From its inception, the fundamentalist Iranian regime has pointed in the direction of "the great Satan," the US, and Hezbollah has followed suit, with suicide attacks and other terrorist activities that targeted US troops stationed in Lebanon in the mid-1980s, and also with involvement in global terrorism, as acknowledged on several occasions by US government officials (Azani 2005).

Constructing Nasrallah's decision matrix

Hezbollah experts agree that

> [d]ecision-making in Hezbollah is truly collective and very much in tune with its highly disciplined rank and file … There is often a degree of tension among these various constituencies, but such tensions are

> usually contained and subjugated to the higher interests of the party. This decision-making mechanism is presided over by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah.
>
> (Agha 2004)

Therefore, Nasrallah's personal role in policy decisions in Hezbollah is central, and analyzing his background and perception of Hezbollah's interests and strategic environment is of vital importance for determining Hezbollah's next moves. Understanding Hezbollah, then, requires an understanding of Hassan Nasrallah.

Hassan Nasrallah

Hassan Nasrallah was born in Beirut, on August 31, 1960, and spent most of his young days in South Lebanon, eventually joining the Shi'ite resistance group, Amal. During that period he associated with Abbas Musawi, the future secretary-general of Hezbollah who was assassinated by Israel on 1992, and with Sheikh Fadlallah, the supreme Shi'ite cleric in Lebanon and later Hezbollah's "spiritual leader." In 1982 he left Amal, joining the newly founded Hezbollah in 1985. From the onset, Nasrallah's involvement in Hezbollah has been on the military side of the organization's activities: in 1987 he was instrumental in driving the Amal forces out of Beirut, and after a period of study in Iran, to bolster his religious credentials, he returned to lead Hezbollah's commandos in South Lebanon. His operational success, and his good ties with the Iranians (cultivated in a second stint in Iran between 1989 and 1992) led to his appointment as Hezbollah's Secretary-General, "over the head" of Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem (Moubayed 2005).

During the fierce armed struggle led by Hezbollah against the Israeli occupation in South Lebanon (1992–2000), Nasrallah was involved both in directing (but apparently not directly planning) the military actions, and in turning Hezbollah into a major social and political force in Lebanon. Nasrallah employed both psychological warfare and propaganda, bolstered by Hezbollah's *al-Manar* television network and other media outlets, and the extensive charity and social aid created by Hezbollah, to gain popularity for his organization in the Lebanese (not only Shi'ite) public. Unlike the previous leaders of Hezbollah, Nasrallah frequently appeared in the media himself, making use of his personal charisma and rhetorical skills on behalf

of the organization (Azani 2009). In this campaign, Nasrallah used not only fiery speeches and propaganda films, but also cleverly made public relations material, to profit from events such as the death of his 18-year-old son, Hadi, in combat against Israel in September of 1997 (Khatib 2012). This media strategy is indicative of the importance that Nasrallah places upon public support, which he views as a critical element to his success as head of Hezbollah. Moreover, it demonstrates his willingness to pay a personal price in the pursuit of the group's goals.

In view of the discussion in the previous section, Hezbollah's organizational goals can thus be briefly summarized:

1 assure a growing political base in Lebanon;
2 overthrow the State of Israel;
3 consolidate the Islamic Nation in Lebanon.

Combining Nasrallah's goals and disposition with the objectives of the Hezbollah organization, his decision matrix can be described as containing the following dimensions:

The personal—organizational dimension

This dimension is related to Nasrallah's influence within Hezbollah and to his credibility. Nasrallah's standing within his organization is mostly related to his credibility in striving for and achieving his goals. As in other analyzed cases, such as that of bin Laden, this dimension is the critical dimension in view of Nasrallah himself (Mintz 2004; 2005).

Since his rise to power in 1992, Nasrallah's leadership has not been contested, and this has been due to his personal success in promoting Hezbollah's goals. Following the Israeli withdrawal, Nasrallah's popularity and influence has risen considerably, as he was regarded, both by Arab public in Lebanon and elsewhere, and within Hezbollah, as the "hero" who brought about the immense victory embodied in Israel's retreat from occupied territories. Therefore, on the personal dimension, Nasrallah has risen to a high position that he will strive to maintain.

The public–political dimension

This dimension pertains to Nasrallah's standing as a leading Lebanese politician. Following the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, Nasrallah's political prestige has risen considerably. The Shi'ite public in particular and the Lebanese public at large view Nasrallah as the main force behind the first victory of an Arab nation over Israel: an armed struggle followed by a full withdrawal from occupied territories. This has earned him accolades as the "only Arab leader to have evicted Israel from Arab land without having to sign a peace treaty" (Post 2007, 168). At the initial point of the analyzed period, this gives Nasrallah immense potential for gaining more influence and achieving his goals. In view of Hezbollah's specific nature as a multi-dimensional organization (political, national, religious), we should take into serious consideration several statements given by Nasrallah on various occasions, in which he states clearly that Hezbollah is a Lebanese organization and that the Lebanese interest takes precedence over the Iranian one (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002, 78). This dimension seems to be a critical one, similar to Nasrallah's personal standing within his organization.

The Syrian dimension

The special relationship between Hezbollah and Syria is one of Nasrallah's most prominent strategic assets, since Syria is the strongest military and political force in the Lebanese arena, and is clearly able, at any point, to use its influence to curb Hezbollah's military actions or even undermine its military presence in South Lebanon. During the years of the armed struggle in his leadership (1992–2000), Nasrallah managed "to create a process of open and continuous dialogue with the various power centers in Damascus" and thus coordinate its activities in a fashion that takes into account both parties' interests and does not disrupt their strategies" (Agha 2004). This is remarkable due to the fact that Syrian President Hafez Assad actually disliked Islamic fundamentalists and viewed Hezbollah with suspicion because of its Iranian loyalties. He therefore kept Nasrallah at arm's length (Nasrallah once claimed he never met Hafez Assad), although there was a match of interests between the two parties.

The death of Hafez Assad, 1 month after the withdrawal, made this dimension even more important, as Nasrallah had to make sure the novice successor, Bashar Assad, was drawn to his side. Aside from the cordial personal relationship between the two, it is clear Nasrallah had to show

Bashar that his actions were in accordance with Syria's interests in order to gain his support.

The religious (Iran) dimension

One of Nasrallah's key roles is as "Ayatollah Khomeini's representative in Lebanon," in addition to being Hezbollah's chairman (Ranstorp 2016). The original source of legitimacy Hezbollah enjoys in Lebanon and in the Arab world in general stems from its representation of Shi'ite religious interests, under the leadership of the Iranian *marja'ia* (the religious and political supremacy of the Shi'ite spiritual center). In 1987, after he distinguished himself as a military commander, Nasrallah traveled to Iran and resumed his theological studies at the seminary of Qom. This stemmed from his recognition that proper (i.e., Iranian) religious credentials were as important as military prowess in assuming a greater leadership role within Hezbollah. A more practical element of this dimension is Iran's support for the organization. The aid it provides Hezbollah is invaluable for building military capabilities superior to those of some Arab countries, and has released the organization from the constraints generally imposed upon Islamist movements, which usually compel them to adopt a more pragmatic line (Zisser 2002). All of this means that Nasrallah must take into account the Islamic and Shi'ite religious legitimacy to his actions, which are ultimately determined by Teheran.

However, this dimension seems to be less important for Nasrallah relative to the previous two criteria, as Nasrallah has occasionally been seen acting against Iranian dictums, or at least independently from it. For example, in 1998, after an Iranian minister's statement that Israel's withdrawal would be the culmination of Hezbollah's objectives, Nasrallah replied: "What a senior Iranian official says reflects his country's opinion but is not binding upon Hezbollah" (Sobelman 2004, 27) Moreover, it seems that the greater proximity of Syria to the Lebanese theater of operations makes the Syrian dimension slightly more important in Nasrallah's eyes.

The military dimension

The importance of Hezbollah's military might has been emphasized in the past both by its leaders and by strategic analysts. Out of the many armed factions and militias that existed in Lebanon in the 1980s and 1990s,

Hezbollah emerged as the largest and most powerful, in large part due to is unwillingness to comply with either the Taef Accord (1989) or demands from several Lebanese and international leaders to disarm. During the late 1980s and 1990s, Hezbollah underwent a change from a terrorist organization relying on part-time recruits to a guerilla army based on full-time "regulars." By 1990, Hezbollah was believed to rely almost exclusively on "regulars" (Hudson 1999, 177–178). In addition, by mid-2000, Hezbollah held an impressive arsenal of military-grade weapons, ranging from personal machine guns and other field equipment to Katyusha rockets and heavy mortars. In July 2001, Israel estimated that Hezbollah possessed more than 7,000 Katyusha rockets (Sobelman 2004, 83).

Table 4.1 Nasrallah's general decision matrix

	Alternative 1	*Alternative 2*	*Alternative 3*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal				9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)				9
Relations with Syria				8
Religious (relations with Iran)				7
Military				7
Weighted total				

Hezbollah's military force is not only a valuable tool for political ends in the hands of Nasrallah and the leadership of Hezbollah, but also an important element that draws Shi'ites either to join its regular cadres or to support them from without. The preservation and strengthening of Hezbollah's military capabilities, both in terms of personnel and superior arms, is almost certainly a central dimension in Nasrallah's calculations, especially in view of his background in commanding and planning Hezbollah's military actions in South Lebanon. It must be noted, however, that for Nasrallah, as indicated by his actions and statements, the military dimension is less important than the personal, political and Syrian criteria,

since the military is perceived as only one means in achieving Hezbollah's goals, and Nasrallah has shown the capacity to refrain from using or strengthening his military might when the circumstances are not favorable for it. However, the military dimension stands roughly equal to the religious (Iranian dimension).

These criteria make up Nasrallah's general decision matrix, which is depicted in Table 4.1. Below, we examine several of Nasrallah's most important decisions in recent years, applying them to this decision framework. In doing so, we are able to uncover Nasrallah's Decision Code, and to understand more clearly what Hezbollah might be expected to do in the future.

Nasrallah's decision to fight following Israeli withdrawal

In the dynamic political and strategic environment that existed in the latter half of 2000, following the Israeli withdrawal in May, Nasrallah had apparently made numerous "tactical" decisions following his initial strategic decisions. Surprisingly, each of these decisions was based on a two-stage process, whereby he made an initial decision, and then implemented a tactical tweak. This is an obvious two-stage process, and seems to comport well with the experimental and theoretical literature on poliheuristic theory (Mintz 2004). In his initial decision in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the alternatives facing Nasrallah were the following five:

1 *Launch full-scale military campaign against Israel and the US.* This would be a local and international continuation of Hezbollah's policy throughout the 1990s (although the US was not directly attacked by Hezbollah during the past two decades, it is high on the organization's "target bank" for ideological reasons and due to its support of Israel).
2 *Limited-scale campaign against Israel.* This option includes self-imposed limitations on direct actions against Israel, and an emphasis on covert, low-profile actions.
3 *Strategic build-up*. This would involve consolidating a stable base and a reliable strike force, to be preserved for the "right moment" for use against Israel and possibly the US. This is an independent alternative, to be considered separately from the former, since Israel is known to be sensitive to the "deterrent balance" with its enemies. Considerable strengthening of Hezbollah, including, for example, insertion of new

armaments might incite a fierce Israeli retaliation to prevent deployment of weapons that might threaten its civilian population (Nasrallah could consider, for example, Israel's readiness to strike the Iraqi nuclear reactor, perceived as a major change in the regional "deterrent balance" in 1981).

4 *Temporary/permanent ceasefire.* In view of the dissipation of the immediate Israeli threat, Nasrallah could declare a temporary or permanent ceasefire, until the situation is clearer and the need for armed resistance (or lack thereof) made plain. Even without a formal recognition of a truce, working toward easing the tension along the Lebanese/Israeli border could dramatically influence the status of the organization and the overall balance of power, while maintaining military options for future use.

5 *Disarm and turn into a political party.* In choosing this alternative, Nasrallah would turn Hezbollah into one of many political movements in Lebanon who used to have a military wing, but gave up on it following Beirut's pressure, such as the other Shi'ite resistance movement, Amal, and the various Christian and Druze factions.

As it became clear in the following months, Nasrallah decided (undoubtedly after considering the options and ideas of various faction-leaders within the higher echelons of Hezbollah) on a combination of options. During the years 2000–2002, Hezbollah chose to combine options 2 and 3 in the above analysis—a limited-scale military campaign against Israel, combined with a continued effort to build an independent military force against Israel.

Nasrallah's decision-making process appears to have been a two-stage process, where the first stage was based on a "cognitive shortcut," in which only two dimensions were taken into account, and the second stage was a rational, analytic decision.

Initially, Nasrallah declined the first and last options given above because they would collide with his two critical dimensions: the personal–organizational and the public–political. Option 1, full-scale military campaign against Israel and the US, was seemingly rejected for public–political reasons: in the month directly following the withdrawal, there were many indications that the political atmosphere in Lebanese politics wasn't receptive to any more hostilities after the Israeli withdrawal, even if they complied with Hezbollah or Syrian interests. For example, in April 2001, in a rare expression of an independent Lebanese opinion in that time (which

also angered the Syrians), the daily *al-Mustaqbal*, Prime Minister Hariri's mouthpiece, questioned the wisdom of Hezbollah's attacks on Israeli soldiers and whether Lebanon can "bear the consequences of such an operation and its political, economic and social impacts" (Karmon 2005).

As an extreme alternative, Nasrallah could have considered option 5: disarm the present organizational structure of Hezbollah, and enter political life in Lebanon, while the armed struggle was continued by others. This move was actually proposed to Hezbollah by some prominent Lebanese figures following the Israeli withdrawal. As evidenced in Table 4.2, the first stage of the poliheuristic theory analysis shows this option was rejected for personal–organizational reasons: from Nasrallah's biography it is clear that he "grew up" as a leader from within Hezbollah's fighting cadres, and he sees Hezbollah primarily as an armed group. Nasrallah's personal background includes extensive involvement in planning and executing Hezbollah's military actions against Israel in the 1980s and the 1990s. Hezbollah's military might and its successful use are one of the main factors that led to the "victory" over Israel and the withdrawal, which is the basis to Nasrallah's immense personal–political power in Hezbollah, and to his wide popularity in Arab circles. Any permanent damage to this base will damage the personal standing and influence of Hassan Nasrallah himself.

Subsequent to having the two extreme options rejected in the first stage of his decision, Nasrallah had three options to choose from. The remaining choice between the "limited campaign," "strategic build-up" and "ceasefire" was analytical, and based on a rational, compensatory analysis that was intended to maximize benefits and minimize risks, as prescribed by the poliheuristic decision theory (Mintz 2004). An analysis of these alternatives reveals that the first two options have advantages over the "ceasefire" option, and therefore, Nasrallah chose them both. Importantly, these two alternatives were not mutually exclusive, meaning that Nasrallah had the capability to choose both of them and enjoy their combined benefits (and negative implications). Table 4.3 depicts the remaining alternatives and their combinations, along with their numerical implications on each dimension. The precise implications (non-numerical) are omitted, as they can be found in Table 4.2. An analytical examination of the remaining alternatives and their combinations reveals that the combination of options A and B is indeed the highest-rated combination between the three remaining options.

Table 4.2 Nasrallah's decision matrix following Israeli withdrawal—May 2000

	Full-scale military campaign against Israel and the US	*Limited campaign against Israel*	*Strategic build-up*	*Temporary ceasefire*	*Disarm and become political party*	*Wt.*
Organizational–Personal	Strengthen Nasrallah's organizational standing as a militant leader who fights Israeli and US imperialism (10)	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing inside his organization, but militant voices will call for more hawkish measures (6)	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing inside his organization, but militant voices will call for more hawkish measures (6)	Weaken Nasrallah's position in the organization vis-à-vis militant expectations (–2)	Leaves Nasrallah without a power-base in Shi'ite and Lebanese politics (–7)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Marginalize Nasrallah in Lebanese politics due to possible retaliation and operating outside the state's sphere of legitimacy (–5)	Strengthen Nasrallah's political standing as a militant leader who fights Israeli occupation in Shebaa and Palestinian Territories. Can be presented as action within the Lebanese sphere of legitimacy. No fear of retaliation against civilians because of Israeli fear of attacks against its own civilian populace (10)	Strengthen Nasrallah's political standing as a militant leader who is prepared to fight Israeli imperialism; however, possible retaliation might damage vital interests to the Lebanese population; in addition, creating a strong armed force outside the legitimate sphere of Lebanese sovereignty might alienate Hezbollah from other Lebanese forces (5)	Allows Nasrallah to capitalize on his deference to Lebanese state sovereignty while retaining the military framework of Hezbollah (5)	Answers calls by leading Lebanese leaders and allows Nasrallah greater influence in Lebanese politics (8)	9

Relations with Syria	Operating outside Syrian policy limits might strain relations (–1)	Complies with Syria's basic strategic choice of a "cold" war with Israel. However, operating without Syrian consent might strain relations (4)	Does not collide with Syria's basic strategy of "cold war" against Israel, and leaves potential room for strategic cooperation (9)	Possibly complies with Syria's basic strategy of a "cold" war against Israel (4)	Complies with Syria's attempt to dominate Lebanon; however, Hezbollah is left without a valuable balance against Syrian power (7)	8
Religious (relations with Iran)	Probably consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US (9)	Partly consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US; Hezbollah's militant supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other parties (4)	Consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US (8)	Partly consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US; Hezbollah's militant supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other parties (2)	Diminishes Hezbollah's material and military support to Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US; Hezbollah's militant supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other parties (3)	7
Military	Shi'ite population and external help might strengthen the organization; harsh retaliation might lead to material and human damage (6)	Limited risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (5)	Considerable strengthening of military capabilities with limited risk to the organization; possible retaliation might lead to limited material and human damage (9)	Limited risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (5)	Serious damage to Hezbollah's military capabilities (–10)	7
Weighted total	14.2	23.9	29 (max)	10.8	1.6	

In the "real" political environment, the practical implications of the combination of the "limited campaign" and "strategic build-up" alternatives drove Nasrallah into taking small, incremental steps in each direction, in compliance with the specific constraints and opportunities of each political situation.

Thus, Hezbollah's initial step in consolidating its strategic build-up was to take full charge of the South Lebanon area by staging extensive victory parades in the area and attempting to use force to oust the Amal military

presence in the South of the region. Armed clashes broke out between the two groups as early as June 2000. This was the first step in establishing "Hezbollah-land" in Southern Lebanon—a territory under full control of Hezbollah's military forces, and outside the practical control of both Lebanon and Syria. It is clear that Nasrallah used his influence on the new Syrian President in order to acquire Damascus' acquiescence to this move.

Since the organization's victory, South Lebanon has served as a secure base for Hezbollah's military operations against Israel, both in terms of deployment of arms and in recruitment of personnel. This area is home to some 13,000 Katyusha and Al-Fajr rockets (whose range reaches up to 70 km), and no other organization has been allowed to stage military actions from it without Hezbollah's consent (Zisser 2002; Karmon 2005). The acquisition of "strategic" balance-tilting arms, such as the Iranian al-Fajr and the Russian SA-18 imported by Syria, was also undoubtedly achieved as a result of Nasrallah's good relations with Teheran and Damascus. In the past 6 years, Nasrallah has repeatedly used any opportunity presented to him to advance this policy choice.

The "limited campaign" against Israel was also unveiled in a gradual fashion. The location chosen for the majority of the direct military attacks by Hezbollah is a typical example of the concept of the "limited" campaign—the attacks were mostly directed against IDF installations on Mt. Dov, overlooking the Shebaa Farms—a small area on the "border triangle" between Lebanon, Israel and Syria. Hezbollah claims this area belongs to Lebanon, and is unjustly occupied by Israel. It is clear though, that the attacks against the Mt. Dov military positions were no more than a pretext for waging war, albeit in a strictly limited sense, against Israel. The decidedly limited scale of Hezbollah's operations is clear from the relatively low number of Israeli casualties during that period: from the withdrawal to early 2002, Hezbollah's attacks killed only three Israeli soldiers and wounded four others. Another sign of the "limited" continuation of hostilities is the massive build-up of intelligence and covert operations infrastructure on both sides of the new border (such as the establishment of surveillance posts in evacuated IDF posts and covert infiltration missions inside Israel) (Sobelman 2004).

Table 4.3 The second stage in Nasrallah's decision following the Israeli withdrawal

	Limited campaign (A)	*Strategic build-up (B)*	*Temporary ceasefire (C)*	*A+B*	*B+C*	*A+C*	*Wt.*
Organizational–Personal	6	6	–2	12	4	4	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	10	5	5	15	10	15	9
Relations with Syria	4	9	4	13	13	8	8
Religious (relations with Iran)	4	8	2	12	10	6	7
Military	5	9	5	14	14	10	7
Total	23.9	29	10.8	52.9 (max)	39.8	34.7	

Nasrallah's decision to aid the Palestinians (October 2000)

The outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in October of 2000 gave Nasrallah the opportunity to make another move in his "limited campaign" against Israel, when Palestinians in the Territories began their armed struggle against the Israeli occupation. The various Palestinian factions inside Lebanon, many of them possessing armed units and operational capabilities in the South, vied for an opportunity to help their brethren in Palestine proper. That same month, Nasrallah was called to a series of high-level consultations in Beirut, Damascus and Teheran, in which he had to "take a stand" and decide on his reaction to the developments in the Territories.

The alternatives Nasrallah faced on this problem were similar in many ways to those that he considered in May of 2000:

1 *Full-scale military campaign against Israel.* In compliance with Hezbollah's ultimate goal to liberate Jerusalem, Nasrallah could make good on his long-time threats and launch a major attack against Israel, which would have aided the Palestinian cause.

2 *Limited aid to the Palestinians.* This would involve applying Hezbollah's vast know-how and material resources to help the beleaguered Palestinian forces.

3 *Prevent Palestinians from operating from South Lebanon.* As shown above, Nasrallah had taken steps to consolidate his control of South Lebanon. In October 2000, those steps were still underway, and Nasrallah's grip on the South had not been finalized. Allowing Palestinian factions to operate uncontrollably from this area, and exposing his civilian constituency there to Israeli retaliation attacks, might have jeopardized his position.

4 *Encourage Palestinian proxies to act from South Lebanon.* As opposed to the previous option, using the extant Palestinian organizations in the refugee camps of the South, while training them and aiding them materially but publicly denouncing any link or responsibility to their actions, might be a smarter and "safer" way to get involved in the conflict.

5 *Do nothing.* Refraining from any action could be the wisest course of action in view of the complicated situation. Nasrallah could decide to "back off" and consider his involvement in a later, clearer or more favorable scenario.

Nasrallah began by eliminating two of the options that might be detrimental on the critical political dimensions. First, he was concerned that launching a full-scale military onslaught at Israel might have damaged his standing in Lebanese politics if it led to Israeli retaliation against Lebanese civilians. This option was rejected, therefore, at the first step of the decision-making process. Similarly, the "do nothing" option had the potential to anger the militant faction within Hezbollah, weakening Nasrallah's position. For this reason, it was also immediately eliminated. In this decision, as in the prior one, Nasrallah rejected the alternatives considered to be negative with respective to his critical dimensions—his organizational and political standing. The relevant decision matrix is presented in Table 4.4. In the second stage of the decision-making process, Nasrallah considered, in a rational, analytical calculation, his remaining alternatives. As shown below (Table 4.5), the single option that enjoys the maximum benefits on almost all dimensions is "limited aid to the Palestinians." Again, Nasrallah found himself confronted with alternatives that were not mutually exclusive, and therefore he considered combining several of the options ahead of him. In

other words, after deciding to embark on limited aid to the Palestinians, Nasrallah had to decide whether he should simply provide the aid, or combine this with preventing Palestinian groups from operating from the South, or actively encouraging their proxy organizations to do so. As Table 4.5 suggests, our analysis indicates that the scores for both options on all dimensions are close, with a slight preference to forbidding Palestinians from acting from "Hezbollah-land." Immediately following the outbreak of the Intifada, Hezbollah started to funnel funds and armaments to the struggling Palestinian factions, and to take direct military action against IDF military targets, with the kidnapping of three Israeli soldiers in Mt. Dov immediately following a massive IDF operation in the West Bank in March of 2001. A strong indication of the link between this action and the conflict in the Territories was Nasrallah's insistence that the Israeli prisoners be exchanged in return for Palestinian, and not only Lebanese, prisoners held in Israel.

The very similar score of combinations [A+B] and [A+C] in Table 4.5 suggests that it might have been difficult for Nasrallah to determine with certainty which option was superior. Indeed, over this period, Nasrallah oscillated between generally preventing, and yet sometimes allowing, Palestinian operations from South Lebanon. Initially, in October 2000, Nasrallah appeared reluctant to allow this sort of autonomy to the Palestinians. However, as late as May 2002, when Nasrallah was confident enough in his ability to deter Israeli attacks on Lebanese civilians, he allowed the Palestinians to attack Kibbutz Matzuva in Northern Israel (March 2002). Notably, this was an almost singular event, and Nasrallah denied any connection to the perpetrators of this attack.

Hezbollah's "Palestinization," which began at the onset of the Intifada, and became apparent with actions such as the Karine A Affair (in which a weapons ship was apprehended by Israel in January 2002), is sometimes explained by Nasrallah's "search for a cause" in the wake of Israel's withdrawal and the lack of a concrete goal outside the limited theater of the Shebaa Farms (Karmon 2005). Our analysis shows it to be a product of Nasrallah's two-stage decision of October 2000. For personal reasons, concerning both his internal and public standing, Nasrallah was unable to stand by and take no action. Similarly, he was unable to commit the full range of Hezbollah's capabilities to the aid of the Palestinians. From the remaining alternatives, Nasrallah maximized his utility by combining the two most beneficial alternatives according to his perceived dimensions. The

acquisition of strategic arms, decided upon in the previously analyzed instance, continued unimpeded, since it did not affect the dilemma concerning the Intifada.

Table 4.4 Nasrallah's decision to become involved in the *Intifada* (October 2000)

	Full-scale military campaign against Israel	*Limited aid to the Palestinians*	*Prevent Palestinians from operating from the South*	*Encourage Palestinian proxies to act from South Lebanon*	*Do nothing*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Strengthen Nasrallah's organizational standing as a militant leader who fights Israeli and US imperialism (10)	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing inside his organization, but militant voices will call for more (6)	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing inside his organization, but militant voices will call for more (2)	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing inside his organization, but militant voices will call for more (2)	Weaken Nasrallah's position in the organization vis-à-vis militant expectations (–2)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Marginalize Nasrallah in Lebanese politics due to possible retaliation and operating outside the state's sphere of legitimacy (–5)	Strengthen Nasrallah's political standing as a militant leader who fights Israeli occupation in the Territories. Can be presented as action within the Lebanese sphere of legitimacy. No fear of retaliation against civilians because of Israeli fear of attacks against its own civilian populace (10)	Allows Nasrallah to retain his standing with Shi'ite population by protecting them from "Israeli aggression" in retribution for Palestinian attacks. Possible damage to Nasrallah's political standing as a militant leader who is prepared to fight Israeli imperialism (5)	By publicly denying giving help to Palestinian proxies, Nasrallah can maintain his position as acting within the Lebanese sphere of legitimacy. No fear of retaliation against civilians because of Israeli fear of attacks against its own civilian populace (9)	Allows Nasrallah to capitalize on his deference to Lebanese state sovereignty while retaining the military framework of Hezbollah (5)	9
Relations with Syria	Operating outside Syrian policy limits might strain relations (–1)	Complies with Syria's basic strategic choice of a "cold" war with Israel. However, operating without Syrian consent might strain relations (4)	Does not collide with Syria's basic strategy of "cold war" against Israel and leaves potential room for strategic cooperation (9)	Possibly complies with Syria's basic strategy of a "cold" war against Israel (4)	Does not collide with Syria's basic strategy of "cold war" against Israel, and leaves potential room for strategic cooperation (9)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	Probably consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US (9)	Partly consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US; Hezbollah's hardline in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant parties (4)	Partly consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant parties (2)	Partly consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant parties (4)	Diminishes Hezbollah's material and military support to Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant parties (2)	7
Military	Shi'ite population and external help might strengthen the organization; harsh retaliation might lead to material and human damage (6)	Strengthens military elements engaged in the activity, with limited risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (5)	No risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (2)	Possible risk to the organization due to Israeli retaliation; in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (–1)	No risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (2)	7
Weighted total	14.2	23.9 (max)	16.3	15.2	12.7	

Table 4.5 The second stage in Nasrallah's decision following the *Intifada*

	Limited aid to the Palestinians (A)	*Prevent Palestinians from operating from the South (B)*	*Encourage Palestinian proxies (C)*	*A+B*	*B+C*	*A+C*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	(6)	(2)	(2)	8	4	8	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	(10)	(5)	(9)	15	14	19	9
Relations with Syria	(4)	(9)	(4)	13	13	8	8
Religious (relations with Iran)	(4)	(2)	(4)	6	6	8	7
Military	(5)	(2)	(–1)	7	1	4	7
Total	23.9	16.3	15.2	40.2 (max)	31.5	39.1	

Note:Scores for combination options are calculated as the arithmetic mean of their components.

An analysis of Nasrallah's actions shows that he pursued the alternatives he selected in a gradual way, consistent with prudent and calculated thinking: Nasrallah used every available opportunity to act on each of the combined alternatives he chose, and in doing so demonstrated the same decision pattern that was uncovered in the analysis of his choice in the months directly following the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

Nasrallah's decision not to become involved in Iraq (2003)

The brisk and successful American campaign against Saddam Hussein in Iraq was followed by a continuous multi-sided conflict in Iraq that has raged since the second half of 2003, with the US remaining in the country until the end of 2011. Various elements, some of them local Sunnis and Shi'ites, and

some of them Islamic or Jihadist supporters of al-Qaeda from outside of Iraq, initiated a bloody guerilla war against the American presence in Iraq. This dispute presented Nasrallah with an opportunity to enter a regional conflict and engage his organization in combat against its enemies, as a campaign would satisfy three criteria: it would be staged against one of Hezbollah's principal ideological targets, the occupation of Arab lands by Western invaders; it would involve aiding the Iraqi Shi'ites, naturally close to the hearts of Lebanese Shi'ites; and it would help in Iran's effort to dominate the Shi'ite communities across the Arab world. A schematic outline of Nasrallah's alternatives concerning this problem includes:

1 *Full-scale military campaign in Iraq.* As in previous similar cases, this alternative means committing the full range of Hezbollah's capabilities to the American–Iraqi confrontation. In selecting this alternative, Nasrallah could use both the Iraqi Shi'ites, natural sympathizers with Hezbollah's successful struggle against Israel as an armed Shi'ite resistance group, and Hezbollah's far-reaching military capabilities, which undoubtedly permitted Nasrallah to project his force onto the Iraqi theater.

2 *Continue limited campaign against Israel and strategic build-up.* This alternative means staying away from the Iraqi conflict, and concentrating on the previously decided-upon policy of a limited campaign against Israel, both directly and by supporting the Palestinians, combined with a constant effort to bolster Hezbollah's strategic arsenal in Lebanon.

3 *Limited, covert help to Shi'ite resistance in Iraq*. Hezbollah's covert material and training assistance to the Palestinians made it obvious that Nasrallah had the option of taking a similar path with the Iraqi Shi'ites. By training guerilla warriors and supplying arms, Nasrallah could have propagated the Shi'ite (and ultimately Islamic) struggle against the hated U.S presence in Iraq.

4 *Do nothing*. Facing the forceful American onslaught in Iraq, and the extensive pressure of Washington on Beirut and Damascus to curb Hezbollah's actions, Nasrallah could have elected to stand by and "wait out" the American presence in the Middle East. This alternative refers not only to the Iraqi theater, but also to the Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts, since Israel, emboldened by the American presence, might be

tempted to retaliate in force following any Hezbollah activities that conflict with Israeli interests in the region.

Had the alternative to use Shi'ite proxies for action against American forces been a viable one, no doubt Nasrallah would have considered it, as in the Palestinian case. As discussed in the previous case, Nasrallah probably would have used this option. However, in reality, there was no such available alternative, as the Shi'ite factions in Iraq were not as receptive to Nasrallah's overtures as the Palestinians, who both had an existing infrastructure in Hezbollah's area of influence in South Lebanon, and were ready to receive any help given to them by outside forces.

Nasrallah's analysis of the situation facing him can be described, in this case as in the previous ones, as a two-stage choice, albeit a choice that was simpler than the previous two. In this scenario, it appears Nasrallah had rejected the "temptation" to move in and become involved in the Iraqi situation in the first step of the decision-making process. The fear that American retaliation would damage Nasrallah's position was apparently so acute that Nasrallah did seriously consider against risking himself with exposure of even limited Hezbollah involvement in this conflict. Therefore, he vehemently rejected and denied all allegations that Hezbollah operatives were in Iraq. We argue that Nasrallah is a leader who takes seriously the potential critical damage that any violent confrontation with the US could cause to his influence in Lebanese politics, should the Americans make good on their threats to treat Nasrallah in the same fashion that they treated bin Laden and his accomplices. This is evident in his immediate rejection of the more militant options available to him.

In the second stage of the decision, Nasrallah was left with the choice between refraining to act on any of his "open fronts" in Iraq, and continuing his present short-range, strategic activities against Israel. In this case, the two options were mutually exclusive, and Nasrallah was unable to opt for a combination of the two. Thus, he considered them in strictly comparative terms. The "Do nothing" alternative would have provided a limited benefit, at best, to Nasrallah. Rather, he felt that he would gain more from continuing his actions against the "traditional" target of Israeli occupation of Shebaa farms and the Palestinian territories, especially since the risks that the strategy involved were considered to be minimal. This explains the fact that during the latter half of 2003, and throughout the entire American occupation, which ended in 2011, apart from numerous propaganda clips

directed at Iraqi Shi'ites that were aired on *Al-Manar* television, and some public encouragements to act, Nasrallah continued to concentrate his activities on the Israeli front, almost as if there was no American military presence in a nearby country.

Thus, as illustrated in Table 4.6, although Nasrallah was greatly tempted to act on the opportunity offered to him by the Iraqi conflict, he ultimately found such action to run contrary to his interests. According to certain sources, he was even urged toward action by some elements within Hezbollah, possibly prominent military figures, who advised him that the US "will come after us, we'd better stop them" by acting in Iraq. Our analysis shows that Nasrallah rejected this temptation, since all of the "active" alternatives available to him would likely be detrimental with respect to the critical dimensions of organizational standing and political influence. Had the organizational situation within Hezbollah encouraged a more risk-acceptant outlook with respect to the conflict (thus raising the penalty for the "Do nothing" alternative), or had there been a viable alternative to use Shi'ite proxies as a "safe" mode to act clandestinely, Nasrallah would likely have acted differently. Alternatively, it is possible that, unseen by the prying eye of publicly available sources, Nasrallah *had* indeed found a covert channel to act in Iraq. In this case, there could be no doubt that this opportunity was seized upon, and that there are (or were) Hezbollah assets active in Iraq. Although it is not possible to validate this speculation, it appears to be an especially plausible explanation.

Table 4.6 Nasrallah's decision not to join the American–Iraqi conflict (2003)

	Full-scale military campaign	*Continue limited campaign against Israel and strategic build-up*	*Limited, covert help to Shi'ite resistance in Iraq*	*Do nothing*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Strengthen Nasrallah's organizational standing as a militant leader who fights Israeli and US imperialism (10)	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing inside his organization, but militant voices might call for more (6)	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing inside his organization, but militant voices will call for more (2)	In the long term, might weaken Nasrallah's position in the organization vis-à-vis militant expectations (0)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Marginalize Nasrallah in Lebanese politics due to possible retaliation and operating outside the state's sphere of legitimacy (–5)	Strengthen Nasrallah's political standing as a militant leader who fights Israeli occupation and Lebanese national goals. Can be presented as action within the Lebanese sphere of legitimacy. No fear of retaliation against civilians because of Israeli fear of attacks against its own civilian populace (10)	Exposure of Hezbollah involvement in Iraq might Marginalize Nasrallah in Lebanese politics due to possible American retaliation and operating outside the state's sphere of legitimacy (–5)	Allows Nasrallah to capitalize on his deference to Lebanese state sovereignty while retaining the military framework of Hezbollah (5)	9
Relations with Syria	Operating outside Syrian policy limits might strain relations (–1)	Complies with Syria's basic strategic choice of a "cold" war with Israel. However, operating without Syrian consent might strain relations (4)	Syrian position unclear; Operating outside Syrian policy limits might strain relations (0)	Does not collide with Syria's basic strategies, and leaves potential room for strategic cooperation (6)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	Consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against the US and its attempt to dominate Iraqi Shi'ites (9)	Partly consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant, parties (4)	Consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against the US and its attempt to dominate Iraqi Shi'ites (7)	Diminishes Hezbollah's material and military support to Iran's ongoing struggle against the US; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant, parties (2)	7
Military	Shi'ite population and external help might strengthen the organization; harsh American retaliation might lead to material and human damage (6)	Strengthens military elements engaged in the activity, with limited risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (5)	Strengthens military elements engaged in the activity, with limited risk to the organization; harsh American retaliation might lead to material and human damage (5)	No risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (2)	7
Weighted total	14.2	23.9 (max)	5.7	12.1	

Nasrallah's decision to continue conflict following Syrian withdrawal (2005)

The beginning of the year 2005 found Nasrallah facing a difficult and serious regional situation, which offered him both new opportunities and new threats. Following the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri (February 2005) and the widespread protest by opposition parties against Syrian occupation, Nasrallah had to brace himself to face a Lebanon without his closest and strongest patron. The pull-out of Syrian forces presented Nasrallah with greater maneuvering space in the Lebanese theater, but also with the need to consider Hezbollah's relations to the various political factions in the country. At the same time, Syria, Nasrallah's patron in Lebanon, was suffering from growing international isolation due to its presence in Lebanon, its support for terrorism in Iraq and Israel, and its relationship with Iran, a state that openly refused to cooperate with the international community on the matter of its nuclear program until at least

2015. In 2005, Nasrallah was presented with the possibility to aid his patrons by "drawing the fire" away from them by escalating events in the Lebanese arena, but also with the ominous possibility that Hezbollah would be used as a bargaining chip and discarded in the face of growing international pressure. Nasrallah's alternatives in post-Syrian Lebanon can be outlined as follows:

1 *Escalate armed activity*. During the years 2003–2005, the region witnessed a significant spread of Jihadist influence. With hundreds of Arab militants striving to cross the Syrian border into Iraq and join the insurgency, Nasrallah could have considered joining the fray and striking at American targets, or increasing the level of its operations on the Israeli front.
2 *Continue limited campaign against Israel*. The stockpiling of long-range rockets, the build-up of strategic capabilities and the maintaining of the "rules of the game" on the Lebanese–Israeli border, along with limited aid to the Palestinians, could continue unabated by recent developments.
3 *Consolidate independent political power*. The power vacuum created in Lebanon with the Syrian pull-out left Nasrallah leading the strongest armed faction in Lebanon. This position could be used to achieve greater political influence outside of present political alliances.
4 *Join loyalist camp*. The Syrian influence in Lebanon did not entirely end with the withdrawal of their troops. Many elements in Lebanese society, among them several affluent and prominent figures, such as President Lahoud and the Mikati clan, remained Syrian allies. Nasrallah could use his influence and long-time loyalty to Damascus to rally those forces.
5 *Join "progressive" forces*. By joining forces with the growing alliance of "progressive," anti-Syrian forces, Nasrallah would ally himself with the most popular grouping in the country, which led the post-Hariri government coalition. In view of past comments by many elements of this camp, entering a "dialogue" with the opposition would eventually mean entering a "dialogue" about Hezbollah's arms, a question of growing concern among the supporters of Lebanese state sovereignty.

Nasrallah's alternatives are clearly divided between maintaining the aggressive identity of his organization and continuing the armed operations

(options 1 and 2), and entering the political process, which would involve making Hezbollah more of a political faction than an armed resistance movement (options 3 through 5). Although in the early 1990s Nasrallah had initiated Hezbollah's "Lebanonization," a process that ended with Hezbollah taking part in all regional elections in Lebanon since 1992, Hezbollah continued to keep the conflict boiling (or perhaps simmering) throughout the 2000–2005 period. Opting for one of the "political" alternatives might lead, in the long run, to a change in the orientation of Hezbollah away from military resistance.

Analysis of this dilemma indicates that once again, in the first stage of the "game," Nasrallah eliminated the two most radical alternatives, which were detrimental with respect to his two critical dimensions (see Table 4.7). As in previous decisions, escalating the level of armed operations was rejected primarily due to its severe negative effect on Nasrallah's standing in Lebanese politics, in view of the imminent danger of American or Israeli retaliation, which would damage Lebanese civilians and lead to a plummet in popular support for both the organization and its leader. On the other hand, Hezbollah's leader couldn't afford to endanger his salient position in Lebanese politics, by joining either the unpopular loyalist camp or the "progressive" forces that drove the Syrians out of the country. The last alternative was detrimental to Nasrallah's personal standing within the organization, as any process that ends in negotiations over disarmament could make him look weak in the face of his followers and intra-group rivals. In Nasrallah's eyes, disarmament, or any open and frank public discussion of Hezbollah's arms that would lead to disarmament, would deal a mortal blow to his influence within the organization. Without his arms and his Syrian ally, Nasrallah would be reduced to nothing more than another squabbling leader of a Lebanese political faction, for which he and (more importantly) an overwhelming majority of his organization have expressed open disdain. Hatred toward Lebanon's corrupt and quarrelsome political arena is deeply rooted in the political thought of a majority of Hezbollah's activists. On July 2003, a Hezbollah observer wrote in *al-Intiqad*, the movement's periodical: "It is not that the system in Lebanon is corrupt, but rather that corruption has become the system.." Facing this sort of attitude within his organization, it is clear that Nasrallah could not consider disarmament and joining the anti-Syrian "progressive" forces, in spite of their growing influence in the Lebanese street.

In the second stage of the decision-making process, after declining either to escalate the armed conflict or to join one of the major political factions in the country, Nasrallah was left with two remaining options. Fortunately for him, the two were not mutually exclusive: he could combine continuing the "limited" conflict with Israel, with entering the political process as an independent force, which would allow him to compensate for the negative effects of either on the various dimensions.

Thus, during the first two-thirds of 2005, Nasrallah took steps both to propagate the struggle against Israel and to play a greater part in Lebanese politics and government. In June 2005, a Hezbollah mortar attack killed an Israeli soldier, and a month later the newly elected Lebanese Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora, presented his new cabinet which included, for the first time ever, a Hezbollah minister. All throughout this period, Nasrallah carefully refrained from aligning himself with any of the existing political camps. This explains both the widespread use of Lebanese national flags in Hezbollah's demonstrations and the organization's refusal to join in the actions initiated by the rest of the opposition groups, such as the mass rally in Beirut's Martyr Square or the general strike declared on late February. As a prominent Hezbollah expert put it during April of 2005, "Until recently, [Hezbollah] saw itself as part of the opposition but without being anti-Syrian. Now it is pro-Syrian but it doesn't fall into the loyalist camp. So it falls outside all camps and that is precisely how it derives its strength."

In his March 2005 response to President Bush's encouragement to Hezbollah to run for public office, Nasrallah could not have been more blunt concerning the question of disarmament:

> I'm holding on to the weapons of the resistance because I think the resistance is the best formula to protect Lebanon and to deter any Israeli aggression … As long as Lebanon is threatened, even if we remain threatened for a million years, our will to our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren is that their national, human, moral and religious holy duty is to protect their people.
>
> (El Ghoul and Zaaroura 2005)

Our analysis shows, that in this decision, Nasrallah immediately rejected the alternative that would eventually bring about disarmament, due to the critical blow that this would deal to his personal standing within the organization. The relative advantages that joining the "progressive" forces in Lebanon

carried on other dimensions were not taken into account, nor were the advantages of other alternatives such as intensifying the armed conflict with Israel or in Iraq (which had the potential to lead to massive retaliation). This is also clear from a February 2005 press release, in which Hezbollah rejected the idea of involvement in the Iraqi conflict by stating: “the whole world is against us. We can’t afford to hurt our image by having a presence in Iraq.”

In his decision following the Syrian withdrawal in May 2005, summarized in Table 4.7, Nasrallah acted in a pattern similar to the rest of the decisions that he had made following the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000. Throughout the examined period, his decision-making characteristics reflected a two-stage process, in which he first eliminated those alternatives that damaged his personal interests, both within the organization and with respect to the political scene as a leader of the Shi’ites in Lebanon. The decision to enter the political process as an independent force, and enter the government of Lebanon, was a product of this calculation—after eliminating all other political alternatives, which would have exposed Nasrallah to the danger of losing Hezbollah’s arms as well as its Syrian backing. This decision was combined with the previous decision to continue a limited conflict with Israel, using the same strategy as before: strategic military build-up, covert aid to the Palestinians, and a calculated, contained, continuous duel with Israel over the border.

Table 4.7 Nasrallah's decision to continue conflict following Syrian withdrawal (May 2005)

	Escalate armed activities	*Continue limited campaign against Israel and strategic build-up*	*Consolidate independent political power*	*Join loyalist (pro-Syrian) camp*	*Join anti-Syrian opposition This would almost certainly mean eventually entering a dialogue about disarmament*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Strengthen Nasrallah's organizational standing as a militant leader who fights Israeli and US imperialism (10)	Maintain Nasrallah's position within the organization; there are presently few internal voices calling for more action (3)	Strengthen Nasrallah's organizational standing as an independent leader with considerable political influence (7)	Strengthen Nasrallah's position within the organization due to Shi'ite support of Syrian influence (5)	Disengagement from Syria and potential disarmament will leave Nasrallah without any external allies and without a power-base in Shi'ite and Lebanese politics, thus considerably weakening him (–8)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Marginalize Nasrallah in Lebanese politics due to possible retaliation and operating outside the state's sphere of legitimacy (–5)	Little or no interest in Lebanese public in the Israeli occupation of Shebaa and Palestinian Territories. In the past five years, Hezbollah has suffered criticism for operating outside Lebanese sphere of legitimacy (0)	Increase Nasrallah's influence in Lebanese politics as Hezbollah becomes the balancing force between pro- and anti-Syrian factions (8)	Tarnish Nasrallah's nationalist credentials; serious damage to Nasrallah's influence should the opposition grow in popularity or should the Syrians relinquish support of Hezbollah (–8)	Increase Nasrallah's influence in Lebanese politics as Hezbollah becomes one of the main forces in the anti-Syrian faction (8)	9

Relations with Syria	With Syria's growing isolation, this might help divert attention from Damascus; on the other hand, Nasrallah might be discarded with mounting world pressure on Syria (5)	Compatible with Syria's basic strategic choice of a "cold" war with Israel. After the withdrawal, presents Syria with its only remaining available tool against Israel in Lebanon (5)	Partial joining of forces with anti-Syrian elements might strain relations (0)	Strengthens Nasrallah's relations with Damascus. After the withdrawal, presents Syria with a valuable tool of influence within Lebanon or against Israel (10)	Joining forces with anti-Syrian elements will strain relations. Disarmament will lower the usefulness of Hezbollah as a Syrian ally (−5)	8
Religious (relations with Iran)	Probably consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US might help divert attention from Teheran's nuclear program; on the other hand, Nasrallah might be discarded with mounting world pressure on Syria (5)	Compatible with Iran's complicated regional and international situation; might help divert attention from Teheran's nuclear program (6)	Consistent with Iran's interest in maintaining influence in Lebanon; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant, parties (3)	Consistent with Iran's interest in maintaining influence in Lebanon; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant, parties (3)	Partially consistent with Iran's interest in maintaining influence in Lebanon; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or elect to help other, more militant, parties (3)	7

Military	Shi'ite population and external help might strengthen the organization; harsh retaliation might lead to material and human damage (6)	Limited risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice; possible retaliation might lead to limited material and human damage (5)	Probably allows Hezbollah to maintain its military arm and Syrian material support. However, entering the political scene might require a temporary lull in military actions (1)	Allows Hezbollah to maintain its military arm and Syrian material support. However, entering the political scene might require a temporary lull in military actions (3)	Certain damage to military force due to distancing from Syria, even before disarmament (–10)	7
Weighted total	16.2	14.4	16.3 (max)	9.5	–8.9	

Summary of Nasrallah's decisions prior to July 2006

Previous analyses of Hezbollah's actions and strategies have attempted to approach the problem from the organizational point of view, outlining the various elements affecting the organization's perception of its "strategic environment" and options (see Sobelman 2004; Karmon 2005; Zisser 2002). This chapter attempted to understand the threat this organization poses to the safety of Israeli and American civilians from the point of view of its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, using the ADA Procedure.

Our analysis of a subset of his decisions suggests that each military–strategic decision taken by Hassan Nasrallah in the period from the Israeli withdrawal to the middle of 2006, consisted of a two-stage decision process. In the first stage, Hezbollah's secretary-general eliminates the set of alternatives that would be detrimental to his standing within Hizbalalh or to Hezbollah's standing within Lebanon. This first phase is dimension-based, rather than alternative-based, as it is a shortcut that removes from consideration any politically harmful options, without considering other types of benefits that they might bring. In the second stage, Nasrallah selects the alternative that scores highest across all dimensions, often combining multiple options when they are not mutually exclusive. Whether it is artillery barrages over Israeli positions on Mt. Dov, accepting or seeking Syrian military aid or setting up covert operations inside the Palestinian territories, Nasrallah seems to be keen on maximizing his benefits and minimizing his

risks in his choices, as expected from a leader who follows a rational choice model. Notably, Nasrallah never crosses the political lines outlined above: Hezbollah never moved an iota in the direction of partial or complete disarmament, as demanded by UN Resolution 1559, and demonstrated caution not to cross several "red lines" that would plunge Hezbollah's actions into a total war, such as actions against the US, or actions outside the Middle Eastern theater of operations (though it is known that Hezbollah has such operational capabilities).

Further study into Nasrallah's decision-making pattern might reveal additional features of this leader's Decision DNA. An analysis of Nasrallah's decisions in the various prisoner-exchange negotiations (which we present below), for example, would show Nasrallah's decision process in a different strategic situation and allow us to compare the critical dimensions with respect to a different (i.e., non-military) issue. However, we argue that the basic result of our analysis should be consistent with further research: Nasrallah will not take any course of action that he perceives to be detrimental to his political standing within Hezbollah or the Lebanese political scene, and will seek to choose rationally between other alternatives, in order to maximize his benefits across the other dimensions.

This result allows us to make the tentative prediction that as long as Nasrallah's perceived personal influence is based on Hezbollah's arms, the organization will not agree to disarm or to be expelled from South Lebanon. However, those constraints, like anything in the political reality, are subject to manipulation and change, and this should serve policy-makers in both Jerusalem and Washington as both a warning and an opportunity.

Inverted decision calculus: Nasrallah's decision-making in the July 2006 conflict

Throughout the rest of the chapter, we have focused on Nasrallah's responses to conflict opportunities following Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon. Now, we turn to a decision in which Hezbollah has been put on the defensive. In addition to examining Nasrallah's decision profile in a new context, we show how ADA can be used to analyze counterfactuals. This section focuses on Nasrallah's decision to attack Israel following Israeli reprisal in the July War of 2006. It also presents an analysis of a

counterfactual scenario in which Israel did *not* retaliate forcefully to the initial Hezbollah kidnapping of Israeli soldiers.

The July 12, 2006 border attack at Zarit was meant to be the onset of the most severe armed conflict that Israel and its immediate neighbors had experienced since the previous Israeli war with Lebanon. One of the most intriguing aspects of this crisis is Hassan Nasrallah's decisions: the initial decision to ignite the conflagration, and his more important decision to launch a full-scale attack against Israel, using all his available military assets. Nasrallah's decision to "go for it" in full force stands in sharp contrast to the cautious and meticulous path he had walked since the Israeli withdrawal in 2000 gave him the opportunity to gain full control of South Lebanon and create for himself significant national and even regional political and military standing. In deciding to employ his military capabilities to the fullest extent, Nasrallah risked his standing, and exposed himself to Israel's retaliatory power. However, despite the divergence in outcome from the previous decisions, we will argue that this decision was reasonable and even expected, given Nasrallah's decision pattern. In this instance, Nasrallah's decision was influenced by Israel's decision to attack Lebanon in force, in response to Hezbollah's initial challenge. A counterfactual analysis suggests that had Israel refrained from launching its attack, Nasrallah's decision could have gone another way, and he might have chosen to enter negotiations on the fate of the hostages taken during Hezbollah's initial attack at Zarit.

In the years following the 2000 withdrawal, Nasrallah held to the policy of maintaining a limited conflict with Israel and refraining from escalating his attacks to a full-scale conflict while strengthening his power-bases and striving to gain more influence within Lebanese politics, using Hezbollah's welfare infrastructure and social enterprises and his own image as the leader who defeated the Israelis in the South. To Nasrallah, the Zarit attack on July 12, 2006 was no different from any of Hezbollah's other post-2000 cross-border "stings" against Israel. From his perspective, there was no particularly different decision calculus before the decision to kidnap the Israeli soldiers and fire rockets at Northern Israel. Rather, these acts were consistent with the rest of the conflict during the 2000–2006 period. Nasrallah could expect Israel to deliver a retaliatory strike at Hezbollah positions across the border, and perhaps enter a mode of indirect negotiations on prisoner exchange, that would have strengthened his organizational and political influence.

Israel, however, took a different—and unexpected—course of action. In the days following the attack, it showed Nasrallah and the whole world that it was determined to put into use the war machinery of the IDF in order to strike a blow at Hezbollah and its assets. Facing this change in the environment of the conflict, Nasrallah had to reconsider Hezbollah's alternatives.

Nasrallah's alternatives facing the fierce Israeli response can be identified as follows:

1 *Full-scale military conflict*. Use all (or almost all) of Hezbollah's available military resources to attack Israel and create maximum damage to its civilians.
2 *Continue limited conflict.* Similar to the "normal" state of affairs between the two actors—launch several Katyusha attacks at Israel's North, continue indirect aid to the Palestinian struggle, and otherwise refrain from crossing the established "rules of engagement."
3 *Enter negotiations on prisoners.* As in the last border conflict, Nasrallah could have opted to open negotiations on the return of Lebanese (or even Palestinian) prisoners in exchange for the captured Israeli soldiers. Entering negotiations at this stage could give Nasrallah the upper hand, since he possessed all of the important chips (the fate of the Israeli soldiers and an ability to further escalate his attacks against Israel) and could practically hold Israel hostage to his will.
4 *Do nothing.* In the face of the harsh Israeli attack, Nasrallah could choose to "lower his head," protect his military and civilian assets to the best of his ability, knowing that his possession of the captured soldiers would eventually bring Israel to the negotiation table.

At first glance, in view of past similar situations, the choice to launch a full-scale attack against Israel would seem to contradict Nasrallah's established decision pattern, as it has previously received a low score on the public–political dimension (see Tables 4.2–4.7). As Table 4.8 indicates, the months that passed following the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, Nasrallah worked toward the consolidation of his political power, in the face of steadily growing criticism by a coalition of leading political forces calling for the disarmament of his organization. Although far from acutely endangering his status, the "National Dialogue" started on March 2006 forced Nasrallah to defend his armed posture on several occasions, stating

that Israel still posed a threat to Lebanon, and a threat that only Hezbollah's arms could remove (see Leenders 2006). The value of the military alternatives on Nasrallah's public–political dimension had been slowly eroding since 2000—choosing to attack Israel didn't seem to be a move that could attract popular support in Lebanon. All through the previously analyzed period, the alternative of full-scale military campaign against Israel was rated lowest on this dimension in Nasrallah's "decision calculus." What changed that made Nasrallah pick the escalation alternative this time?

Table 4.8 Nasrallah's decision to increase the campaign against Israel (July 13, 2006)

	Full-scale campaign against Israel	*Continue limited campaign*	*Enter negotiations on prisoners*	*Do nothing*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Preserve Nasrallah's organizational standing as a militant leader who fights Israeli aggression (10)	Possible danger to Nasrallah's position within the organization facing voices calling for more action (–2)	Strengthen Nasrallah's organizational standing as an independent leader with a tough bargaining position against Israel; might expose him to criticism from elements calling for more decisive action against Israeli aggression (5)	Danger to Nasrallah's position within the organization (–10)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Strengthen Nasrallah in Lebanese politics as the only leader capable of striking back at Israel; his influence might weaken with circles blaming him for the extensive damage (5)	Strengthen Nasrallah in Lebanese politics as the only leader capable of striking back at Israel; however, might increase criticism for operating outside Lebanese sphere of legitimacy and strengthen political circles blaming him for the extensive damage (1)	Strengthen Nasrallah in Lebanese politics as the only leader capable of forcing Israel's hand; however, exposes Nasrallah to criticism for causing extensive damage to Lebanon; might strengthen claims to Hezbollah disarmament (0)	Tarnish Nasrallah's "resistance" credentials; serious damage to Nasrallah's influence (–8)	9
Relations with Syria	Could involve Syria in undesired conflict with Israel and strengthen its international isolation due to support of terrorism. On the other hand, might bring Syria back to relevancy, since Assad is perceived as a legitimate international actor with influence over Nasrallah (–3)	Could involve Syria in undesired conflict with Israel and strengthen its international isolation due to support of terrorism. On the other hand, might bring Syria back to relevancy, since Assad is perceived as a legitimate international actor with influence over Nasrallah (–3)	Might bring Syria back to relevancy, since Assad is perceived as a legitimate international actor with influence over Nasrallah (3)	Weakens relations with Damascus, due to the diminishing use of Nasrallah to Assad (–2)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	Generally consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US, and might help divert attention from Teheran's nuclear program; on the other hand, the public exposure might diminish Nasrallah's use for Iran in a further conflict (5)	Compatible with Iran's complicated regional and international situation; might help divert attention from Teheran's nuclear program (6)	Consistent with Iran's interest in maintaining influence in the Arab–Israeli conflict (3)	Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed by the inaction (−2)	7
Military	All-out conflict with Israel might lead to severe material and human damage (−3)	Limited risk to the organization; in the long run, operational capability might increase due to continuous friction with Israeli forces; IDF strikes might lead to limited material and human damage (3)	Allows Hezbollah to maintain its military arm relatively intact; However, lack of action might deteriorate capabilities in the long run (1)	Allows Hezbollah to maintain its military arm relatively intact; However, lack of action might deteriorate capabilities in the long run (1)	7
Weighted total	12.5 (max)	3	9.7	−18.5	

We argue that Israel's escalation of the conflict significantly altered the context in which the decision took place. The Israeli attack on Lebanese civilian infrastructure in Beirut, the South, and elsewhere, changed the public–political dimension in Lebanon, a critical dimension in Nasrallah's decision calculus, and turned it on its head.

As Table 4.9 demonstrates, prior to the July 2006 conflict, this dimension was consistently used to reject the alternative of all-out conflict with Israel. However, after the Israeli response in July 2006, this was reversed and the public–political dimension actually *favored* a full-scale counterattack on Israel. We argue that this is because the strategic context had changed. Nasrallah no longer had to worry about provoking Israel into retaliation, as it had already happened. No doubt Nasrallah sensed that the Israeli attack would have a major effect on his political standing—both within his organization and in the domestic Lebanese context. However, observing the outcome of the Israeli strikes, Nasrallah was able to update his expectations about the public response. Significantly, Nasrallah expected the Israeli

attacks to create growing frustration and anger in the wider Lebanese public, thus legitimizing a severe attack by Hezbollah in order to "punish" Israel for its actions and "protect" Lebanon. On the other hand, failure to launch this sort of attack would have severely damaged Nasrallah's *political* standing, both within and outside of his organization, as he was expected to make good on his promises and declarations throughout the previous 6 years, that Hezbollah's military power would be the only possible answer to Israel's aggression.

Table 4.9 Nasrallah's public support (political) dimension 2000–2006

Following Israeli withdrawal (May 2000)	*After the outbreak of the* Intifada *(Oct. 2000)*	*Facing the Iraqi conflict (late 2003)*	*Following Syrian withdrawal (May 2005)*	*Following Israeli attacks (July 2006)*
Full-scale campaign: –5	Full-scale campaign: –5	Full-scale campaign: –5	Full-scale campaign: –5	Full-scale campaign: 5
Limited campaign: 10	Limited campaign: 10	Limited campaign: 10	Limited campaign: 0	Limited campaign: 1
Strategic build-up: 5	Prevent Pal. Operations: 5	Limited aid to Iraqis: –5	Independent political power: 8	Enter negotiations: 0
Temporary ceasefire: 5	Use Pal. Proxies: 9	Do nothing: 5	Join loyalist camp: –8	Do nothing: –8
Disarm (do nothing): 8	Do nothing: 5		Join progressive camp: 8	

Underlined are the alternatives selected by Nasrallah

Thus, Nasrallah's *political risk-aversion* actually explains his decision to launch a full-scale attack on Israel, using his entire array of arms (long-range rockets aimed at Haifa, short-range Katyusha rockets, advanced anti-tank missiles, attack drones, and finally, an explosive truck attack thwarted by the IDF in the final days of the conflict), in what appears to be in contradiction to his past constant choice of limiting his conflict with Israel. In this

decision, Nasrallah favored the “full-scale conflict” alternative, even though it was detrimental with respect to the Syrian and military dimensions, in order to avoid the risk of potential damage on the critical dimensions of public support and political standing.

What would have happened had Israel refrained from attacking Beirut the day after Hezbollah’s provocation? This requires speculation on the analyst’s part, but is a question that can be addressed with the ADA Procedure. Having derived Nasrallah’s decision matrix, we can utilize the hypothetical information to predict (but, unfortunately, not verify) his hypothesized response. The key component in this analysis is that restraint on the part of Israel would have made it difficult for Nasrallah to gain political influence using more violence in a limited-scale conflict, reducing the value of escalation. Indeed, the option of war against Israel would likely have had a payoff similar to that of previous decisions, adversely affecting Nasrallah on the critical political dimensions. Thus, the most aggressive option would probably have been eliminated in the initial stage.

The most favorable alternative in the second stage of the decision is the option to enter negotiations on the prisoners. This alternative also matches previous experience, since this was the alternative selected by Nasrallah during the previous hostage crisis with Israel. It is possible, then, to theorize that this would have been Nasrallah’s course of action had Israel not attacked, and he would likely have consented to an external offer of mediation on the hostage’s fate. Table 4.10 clearly indicates that it was the change in the public–political dimension, brought about by the Israeli attack, that eliminated the risks to Nasrallah from escalation (and, indeed, made non-retaliation costly), and freed him to pursue the most advantageous option from a rational perspective.

In escalating the exchange of blows with Hezbollah, Israel changed Nasrallah’s decision-making calculus, and in effect pushed him to retaliate in force in order to preserve his domestic political standing. The analysis suggests that from Nasrallah’s point of view, Hezbollah is primarily a political entity with a political agenda, political goals, interests and aspirations in the inter-party political landscape of Lebanon and in the broader Islamic world, which uses terrorism to advance its political goal. It is not, first and foremost, a military–terrorist organization that also has a political party, as is the common view in Israel. Nasrallah’s full-scale military reaction to Israeli retaliation could have been predicted, had the

Israeli decision-makers been more attentive to the importance of the critical political dimensions in Nasrallah's decision-making.

Table 4.10 Nasrallah's hypothetical decision matrix (no Israeli attack, July 13, 2006)

	Full-scale campaign against Israel	*Continue limited campaign*	*Enter negotiations on prisoners*	*Do nothing*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Preserve Nasrallah's organizational standing as a militant leader who fights Israel (10)	Possible danger to Nasrallah's position within the organization facing voices calling for more action (–2)	Strengthen Nasrallah's organizational standing as an independent leader with a tough bargaining position against Israel; might expose him to criticism from elements calling for more decisive action against Israeli aggression (5)	Danger to Nasrallah's position within the organization (–10)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Marginalize Nasrallah in Lebanese politics due to fear of possible Israeli retaliation and operating outside the state's sphere of legitimacy (–2)	Strengthen Nasrallah in Lebanese politics as the only leader capable of striking at Israel. Might increase criticism for operating outside Lebanese sphere of legitimacy, in view of the meager interest in Lebanon in low-level conflict with Israel (0)	Strengthen Nasrallah in Lebanese politics as the only leader capable of forcing Israel's hand; however, exposes Nasrallah to criticism for causing extensive damage to Lebanon; might strengthen claims for Hezbollah's disarmament(0)	Tarnish Nasrallah's "resistance" credentials; serious damage to Nasrallah's influence (–8)	9
Relations with Syria	Could involve Syria in undesired conflict with Israel and strengthen its international isolation due to support of terrorism. On the other hand, might bring Syria back to relevancy, since Assad is perceived as a legitimate international actor with influence over Nasrallah (–3)	Could involve Syria in undesired conflict with Israel and strengthen its international isolation due to support of terrorism. On the other hand, might bring Syria back to relevancy, since Assad is perceived as a legitimate international actor with influence over Nasrallah (–3)	Might bring Syria back to relevancy, since Assad is perceived as a legitimate international actor with influence over Nasrallah (3)	Weakens relations with Damascus, due to the diminishing use of Nasrallah to Assad (–2)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	Generally consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US, and might help divert attention from Teheran's nuclear program; on the other hand, the public exposure might diminish Nasrallah's use for Iran in a further conflict (5)	Compatible with Iran's complicated regional and international situation; might help divert attention from Teheran's nuclear program (6)	Consistent with Iran's interest in maintaining influence in the Arab–Israeli conflict (3)	Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed by the inaction (–2)	7
Military	All-out conflict with Israel might lead to severe material and human damage (–3)	Limited risk to the organization; in the long run, operational capability might increase due to continuous friction with Israeli forces; IDF strikes might lead to limited material and human damage (3)	Allows Hezbollah to maintain its military arm relatively intact; However, lack of action might deteriorate capabilities in the long run (1)	Allows Hezbollah to maintain its military arm relatively intact; However, lack of action might deteriorate capabilities in the long run (1)	7
Weighted total	6.2	2.1	9.7 (max)	–18.5	

Nasrallah's decision following the Lebanese political crisis (2007)

We now turn to a decision that is largely outside of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. In the last weeks of 2006, the spotlight in Lebanon moved from the South, recuperating from the fierce conflict with Israel and trying to accommodate the Lebanese army and the beefed-up United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon (UNIFIL) force, to Beirut, where a series of political developments brought Nasrallah to a renewed bid for influence over, if not control of, the Lebanese organs of power. The assassination of a Christian minister, Pierre Gemayel, and the political crisis ignited when Hezbollah demanded increased representation in the cabinet were only the prelude to a dramatic series of political rallies by Shi'ites and their supporters, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Seniora and new elections. This background, against which Nasrallah made his decision to launch a mass political campaign against the "March 14" bloc (the liberal-

central coalition opposing Hezbollah and supporting UNSCR 1701), includes several causes of growing concern from his point of view:

1 Renewed pressure from his opponents, with international support, to disarm—feeling empowered by international interest in the question of Hezbollah's arms, the sterile "National Dialogue" process, initiated in mid-2005 toward this goal, no longer satisfied the Lebanese government and its supporters.
2 Growing constraints on Hezbollah actions due to developments in the South, with UNIFIL and Lebanese army units working in tandem to prevent Hezbollah from redeploying its fighters and rockets close to Israel's border. Though not perfect or comprehensive, these actions certainly placed limitations on the organization's actions there.
3 The political "hot potato" of the proposed international tribunal to investigate the murder of Prime Minister Hariri was a contemptuous issue, which Damascus was more than willing to see buried under intra-Lebanese squabbling (to Nasrallah and his supporters this was yet another example of international involvement in their internal affairs).

Facing these challenges, Nasrallah had several alternatives:

1 *Use violence against his opponents.* By attacking either the UNIFIL forces, his political opponents in Beirut or even possibly Israel, Nasrallah could reassert his power and influence.
2 *Strategic build-up.* Although the political and diplomatic environment seemed more hostile than ever toward Hezbollah's rearmament, in the long run, returning to increased use of the land (or even sea and air) supply routes to Iran could provide Nasrallah with increased military options in the future.
3 *Start political campaign.* This would mean using Hezbollah's logistical and financial assets to wage a large public campaign against the March 14 bloc.
4 *Enter negotiations.* By enhancing the "National Dialogue" and seriously engaging his counterparts, Nasrallah could set in motion a more fertile process of dearmament, or perhaps achieve a more comfortable *modus vivendi* in the South.
5 *Do nothing.* Since he was not directly challenged by any of the relevant actors, Nasrallah could elect to stay his position and wait for a better

time to act.

An analysis of this decision returns us to the first decision analyzed in this chapter—Nasrallah's 2000 decision to combine a limited campaign against Israel with strategic build-up of its forces in the South and elsewhere. The significant difference is that following the clear "victory" of 2000 (in Lebanese and Arab eyes), Nasrallah had a wider range of alternatives to choose from. In January of 2007, following the conflict with Israel, which ended in a stalemate as far as the Lebanese population (and Nasrallah himself) were concerned, Nasrallah was facing a tighter ring of political constraints and challenges. In fact, his decision was ultimately limited, as his cognitive shortcut forced him to reject all alternatives save two in the first stage of the decision-making process.

As Table 4.11 suggests, Nasrallah clearly could not allow himself to do nothing in the face of the growing political and military threat facing Hezbollah both in the political arena and in the South—this would cause significant damage on the public–political dimension, as it would marginalize his party. On the other hand, reverting to violence would expose him to even harsher political criticism, and potential retaliation. Finally, the alternative of engaging the local and international actors in fruitful dialogue was also rejected at the first stage, since it would damage both Nasrallah's organizational standing and his political influence. The few remaining alternatives, being compatible with one another, could be combined to maximize the advantages on almost all dimensions, and arguably this was the course taken by Hezbollah's secretary-general.

Following the crisis, Nasrallah chose to begin a strategic build-up of armaments while campaigning for power. However, his efforts were not especially successful, and his bid for political power found itself also mired in difficulties. However, our analysis suggests that this is a course of action that Nasrallah will seek to maintain over time. He prefers to combine visible influence on mass politics with clandestine smuggling of arms, simply because his decision pattern, based on his risk-aversion, does not allow him to pursue any other course of action. This conclusion is actually good news, for if Nasrallah is ever forced to consider alternatives that might result in negative political fallout, he will be likely to refrain from undertaking such actions. Chiefly, if the international community and Israel are able to expose his strategic build-up aided by Iran and Syria, and create the political atmosphere in Lebanon that strongly opposed such a build-up, Nasrallah

would be coerced into halting that course of action, or opening himself up to significant political damage.

Table 4.11 Nasrallah's decision matrix in January 2007

	Use violence	*Strategic build-up*	*Start political campaign*	*Enter negotiations*	*Do nothing*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing as a leader who fights the enemies of the "resistance" (8)	Maintain Nasrallah's position within the organization by facing various challenges (6)	Strengthen Nasrallah's standing as a leader with considerable political influence (7)	Potential damage to Nasrallah's position in the organization from opponents to disarmament (–1)	No real effect, since Nasrallah's position within the organization is already strong (0)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Marginalize Nasrallah in Lebanese politics due to possible retaliation and operations outside the state's sphere of legitimacy (–5)	Increased support from Shi'ite contingency, and heightened criticism from March 14 forces (2)	Increase Nasrallah's influence in Lebanese politics as Hezbollah becomes the rallying force for all factions opposing the government (9)	Potential to damage Nasrallah's influence if he is forced to relinquish his arms (–5)	Marginalize Nasrallah in Lebanese politics as Hezbollah becomes the target of criticism (–5)	9
Relations with Syria	With Syria's precarious international situation, Nasrallah might be discarded to shield Damascus from blame (–4)	Compatible with Syria's basic strategy of countering Western/Israeli power in the area. Presents Syria with an available tool to use against Israel in Lebanon (6)	Partial joining of forces with anti-Syrian elements might strain relations (0)	Weakens Nasrallah as an ally for Damascus; he might be discarded to ease international pressure on Syria (–5)	Weakens Nasrallah as an ally for Damascus; he might be discarded to ease international pressure on Syria (–3)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	Likely consistent with Iran's ongoing struggle against Israel and the US. Might help to divert attention from Teheran's nuclear program; on the other hand, Nasrallah might be discarded with mounting world pressure on Iran (5)	Compatible with Iran's basic strategy of countering Western/Israeli power in the area. Presents Iran with an available tool to use against Israel in Lebanon (6)	Consistent with Iran's interest in maintaining influence in Lebanon; Hezbollah's hardline supporters in Iran might be disappointed and/or choose to help other, more militant, parties (3)	Weakens Nasrallah as an ally for Teheran; he might be discarded if international pressure on Iran grows (–5)	Weakens Nasrallah as an ally for Teheran; he might be discarded if international pressure on Iran grows (–3)	7
Military	Potential to strengthen the organization by attracting support from the Shi'ite population and external sources; however, harsh retaliation might lead to material and human damage (6)	Limited risk to the organization; however, in the long run, operational capability might decrease for lack of practice (2)	Allows Hezbollah to train its logistics in moving activists to Beirut; small chance of Israeli/UNIFIL harassment (4)	Entering negotiations might require a temporary lull in military actions, and disarmament will certainly damage the military (–6)	Difficult for military to maintain readiness and activity under UNIFIL and Beirut's scrutiny (–8)	7
Weighted total	7.2	17.6	19.3 (max)	–17.1	–14.6	

Nasrallah's decision on a lack of overt reaction following the assassination of Imad Moughnieh (2008)

On February 12, 2008, a car exploded in the Soussa neighborhood of Damascus. The blast killed Hajj Imad Fayez Moughnieh, a key senior Hezbollah figure, and his bodyguard. Imad Moughnieh was Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's second in command, and was considered number two within the organization. He was perceived as a key figure in both the construction and operation of Hezbollah's military infrastructure in Lebanon, and was also responsible for the organization's terrorist activities in Lebanon

and abroad.[2] In addition to commanding Hezbollah's fight against the IDF during the second Lebanon war, his organizational role included masterminding the hijacking of airplanes, the abductions of Western diplomats and the bombings of the American Embassy in Beirut, as well as of the Israeli Embassy, and the Jewish Community Center in Argentina. Moughnieh was also a key figure in constructing Hezbollah's military infrastructure in Southern Lebanon and in operating it in emergencies. He built an upgraded military infrastructure, which turned Hezbollah from a terrorist organization with guerilla capabilities into an organization with military capabilities similar to those of a modern nation-state.[3]

While the leadership of Iran and Hezbollah blamed Israel for the assassination, the latter released an official statement, rejecting the attempts made by terrorist elements to ascribe to it any involvement whatsoever in the killing. Nonetheless, Nasrallah delivered a bellicose speech before the funeral procession, setting out and declaring an "open war" on Israel (that is, a war without borders), beyond the Lebanese–Israeli arena, unconstrained by time nor location. Nasrallah also claimed that the death of Imad Moughnieh heralded the end of the State of Israel, which he called "cancerous" and "an artificial entity." However, there was significant incongruity between his threats and his actions. Doing nothing was not an option, given the damage caused to the organization's reputation by the assassination of a very senior figure and the explicit threats subsequently made by Nasrallah. Thus, Nasrallah faced the following alternatives:

1 *Focus on strategic build-up and wait for the perfect opportunity to act*. This would enable Nasrallah to continue to rehabilitate the organization and its military capabilities, while simultaneously awaiting the perfect opportunity to attack.
2 *Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad*: This would require planning, intelligence gathering, and the allocation of financial and human resources. However, the success of such an attack would generate publicity that would strengthen the organization's image.
3 *Launch an attack on military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border*. This would allow Nasrallah to control the intensity and timing of the attacks according to Hezbollah's interests. However, these attacks could easily escalate into full-scale military conflict if Israel decided to react.

4 *Full-scale military conflict*. Use all (or almost all) of Hezbollah's available military resources to attack Israel and cause maximum damage to its civilians. This option would likely lead to war with Israel.

After the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah began rebuilding its civil power and repairing the damage from the war. Within 2 years, the organization had tripled its arsenal to approximately 40,000 missiles and rockets—some of them more powerful than those they had had before—and turned villages into fortified defensive positions (Samaan 2014). These moves suggest that Hezbollah's unwillingness to confront Israel could be interpreted as a tactical step, designed to prevent interference with its military build-up (Henkin 2014). But because the decision not to respond at all to the assassination would weaken Nasrallah's position among Hezbollah members and within Lebanese society, as Table 4.12 demonstrates, this alternative alone was not enough, which may explain the fact that it came in second in the overall calculation of the four alternatives offered.

Furthermore, according to the poliheuristic theory, the alternative of full-scale military conflict was disqualified due to the damage it would cause along the public–political dimension. Of course, this alternative receives the worst overall score of all of the alternatives, primarily because of Iran's opposition to escalating the conflict with Israel at the time and the expected damage to the building of Hezbollah's power following a war with Israel.[5] In the second stage of the decision-making process, Nasrallah was left with three options: focus on strategic build-up, initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad, or launch an attack on military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border. It is likely that, in light of the risk posed by attacking military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border (namely escalation of the conflict with Israel to total war), Nasrallah decided to choose the first two alternatives in order to maximize the organization's interests: focusing on strategic build-up, and initiating and taking part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad.

Apart from the importance of using the poliheuristic approach to disqualify alternatives that can damage the primary dimension that influences Nasrallah's decision-making, the table helps us to identify Iran's influence on Nasrallah's decision-making. In this case, Hezbollah's alleged move toward pragmatism is based to a large extent on an Iranian decision to create a new atmosphere in Lebanon, in order to enable Hezbollah to

reconstruct its strategic capabilities (including long-range rockets and missiles) in Lebanon. This would serve to deter Israel, and would allow the organization to make use of these capabilities at a time to be determined by Tehran in the event that deterrence fails.

Nasrallah's decision on the establishment of a Hezbollah network in Egypt (2005–2008)

In late 2008, Egyptian security services exposed a Hezbollah network operating on Egyptian soil. Immediately following the exposure, the affair was hushed up and received no media coverage. In early April 2009, the Egyptian government decided to make the exposure public. It published a great deal of highly detailed information on the network's activities, and launched a massive media campaign against Iran and Hezbollah, led by President Mubarak. The activity of Hezbollah in Egypt began sometime in 2005, when a Hezbollah operative named Muhammad Yousef Mansour traveled to Egypt on a Lebanese passport bearing the fictitious, Sunni-sounding name, Sami Hani Shihab. Mansour was in charge of Hezbollah's "Egypt file," part of a larger Hezbollah file involving the "Ring Countries" surrounding Israel, such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria (Levitt 2014). In Egypt, which was arguably the most important given the geographic reality of Gaza's border with the Egyptian Sinai, Mansour worked closely with another senior Hezbollah operative, Mohammed Qabalan, a senior operative within Unit 1800, focused on these ring countries, to build a Hezbollah support network in Egypt (ICT 2009).

Table 4.12 Nasrallah's decision on the lack of overt reaction following the assassination of Imad Mughnieh (2008)

	Focus on strategic build-up and wait for the perfect opportunity to act	*Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad*	*Launch an attack on military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border*	*Full-scale military conflict*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Would weaken Nasrallah's position inside the organization because of the desire to avenge Mughnieh's assassination as soon as possible, and to restore the organization's image. (Increasing activity is important for raising the motivation and sense of ability of the organization's members as well as for Nasrallah's status) (4)	If successful, an attack abroad, would significantly strengthen Nasrallah's position inside and outside of the organization, and would satisfy the desire of Hezbollah members to avenge Mughnieh's assassination, strengthening their conviction (7)	Would strengthen Nasrallah's position inside the organization and satisfy the desire of Hezbollah members to avenge Mughnieh's assassination (9)	Could strengthen Nasrallah's position as a strong, fearless leader. However, as the damage to both Hezbollah forces and the civilian population grows, he could face significant criticism for his aggressive response (6)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Would weaken Hezbollah because of the damage to Nasrallah's reputation, especially over time. On the other hand, strategic build up would preserve Hezbollah's status as the force protecting the citizens of Lebanon (4)	A successful attack abroad would significantly strengthen Hezbollah's reputation as a strong and undefeated organization, with the ability to protect Lebanon's interests and its civilians (8)	Would strengthen Hezbollah's reputation. However, this might also provoke criticism among opponents of the organization, primarily because of the fear of escalation, given the persistent visibility of the damage from the last war with Israel (6)	Could weaken the position of the organization because of the excessive reaction of Nasrallah. In addition, criticism would be expected (not only from the organization's opponents), and it would only increase as the damage to both Hezbollah forces and the civilian population grows (−6)	9

Relations with Syria	This alternative is unlikely to affect relations with Syria, especially in light of the fact that the Syrian regime, not wanting to reveal its close ties with an international terrorist organization, has made a point of playing down its connection to the assassination and tried to conduct its own investigation[4] (0)	Relations with Syria would likely be unaffected (0)	General relations with Syria would not be affected, but the degree of military coordination between Hezbollah and the state might increase (0)	General relations with Syria would not be affected, but the degree of military coordination between Hezbollah and the state might increase (0)	8
Religious (relations with Iran)	Would strengthen the relationship with Iran because of its compatibility with Iran's expectations of the organization (Shapira 2009) (10)	Would strengthen relations with Iran since the success of such an attack serves the interests of both sides equally (9)	Would damage relations with Iran. Iran is looking for silence in the Lebanese arena, in order to enable Hezbollah to reconstruct its strategic capabilities, in order to make use of them at a time to be determined by Tehran (Shapira 2009) (–4)	This would severely damage relations with Iran because it does not coincide with Iran's interests (–8)	7
Military	Would strengthen Hezbollah's military position. This would allow Nasrallah to reorganize the command and control system of the organization and increase his arsenal, following the damage that it incurred after the 2006 war with Israel (10)	Would strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah in Israel and the Western world in general (7)	Would strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah against Israel, showing that Nasrallah is willing to execute his threats. However, escalation of the conflict could cause great damage to the organization in general, and to its military wing in particular (6)	Although this would maintain Hezbollah's deterrent power against Israel, another war with Israel would significantly reduce the organization's military capabilities (–7)	7
Weighted total	21.2	24.7 (max)	14.9	–10.5	

The men's mission appears to have broadened over time. It began as an operation focused on smuggling weapons and funds through Egypt to Hamas and other Palestinian groups in Gaza. Following the assassination of Imad Mughniyeh, their new instructions were to carry out surveillance and prepare for an attack on Israeli tourists in Egypt in retaliation for Mughniyeh's death (Levitt 2014). After the affair was exposed, Hezbollah leader Hassan

Nasrallah confirmed that the Hezbollah network was involved in smuggling weapons and "fighters" (i.e., terrorist operatives) into the Gaza Strip, portraying that activity as being perfectly legitimate (BBC News 2010), but he denied the Egyptian allegations that the network's activity was not limited to logistics and that it also included terrorist attacks and subversion Nasrallah claimed that such accusations were groundless.

Since this decision was not in direct response to a particular event, but was rather a planned and initiated process that continued over a number of years, these decisions were not mutually exclusive. Moreover, as time progressed and the context changed, it is possible that Nasrallah's thinking evolved. Therefore, it is essential to consider the changing circumstances in analyzing these alternatives.

The alternatives facing Nasrallah were as follows:

1 *Focus on strategic build-up and wait for the perfect opportunity to act.* This would enable Nasrallah to continue to rehabilitate the strategic array of the organization and its military capabilities, while at the same time choosing the right opportunity to attack.
2 *Expansion of Hezbollah activity to neighboring Arab countries (ring countries), with an emphasis on Egypt*. This alternative would enable Hezbollah to undermine Israeli security—directly and by supporting Palestinian groups—from the countries bordering Israel.
3 *Expand Hezbollah's activity to more remote countries in regions such as Europe and South America*. This would enable Hezbollah to carry out pre-operational surveillance of potential targets that could be used at a future date.
4 *Deliberate escalation, which would involve attacking targets within Israel's borders*. This would strengthen Hezbollah's deterrent capability but could easily deteriorate into full-scale military conflict.

When analyzing Table 4.13, using poliheuristic theory, we can see that the fourth alternative (deliberate escalation) would be disqualified because of the damage it could cause to the critical public–political dimension. This leaves Nasrallah with three alternatives: focus on strategic build-up, expand Hezbollah's activity to ring countries or expand Hezbollah's activity beyond the ring countries. While all three alternatives score relatively high along the core dimensions and the religious dimension, there are important differences between them in the military and Syrian relations dimensions. In the overall

calculation, the strategic build-up alternative is the most preferable, with the "expanding Hezbollah's activity to ring countries" alternative holding a close second place, and the "expanding Hezbollah's activity beyond the ring countries" alternative being least desirable.

Table 4.13 Nasrallah's decision on the establishment of a Hezbollah network in Egypt (2005–2008)

	Focus on strategic build-up and wait for the perfect opportunity to act	*Expanding Hezbollah's activity*		*Deliberate escalation—attack targets within Israel's borders*	*Weigh*
		Ring countries	*Beyond ring countries (South America and Europe)*		
Organizational–Personal	Would strengthen Nasrallah's status in the organization, to a certain extent, and would help to maintain motivation among the organization's members. (7)	Would strengthen Nasrallah's status in the organization because the members of the organization would feel that Hezbollah could control not only Lebanon but the Middle East in general, strengthening their motivation (8)	A successful attack abroad would significantly strengthen Nasrallah's position within the organization, increasing motivation among the organization's members. (8)	This option would reinforce Nasrallah's position in the short term, but would generate criticism from within the organization, which would only increase as the inevitable conflict with Israel escalated. (5)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	This alternative would strengthen support for Nasrallah among Hezbollah supporters. However, it could be expected to provoke criticism among political elements in Lebanon who fear that the organization's military strength will increase at the expense of the Lebanese army (6)	This would strengthen Hezbollah's reputation as a strong organization, with impressive military capabilities inside and outside Lebanon. However, If Hezbollah's activities were exposed, criticism would arise both within Lebanon and abroad because of the violation of the sovereignty of regimes with friendly ties to Lebanon (7)	This option would strengthen Hezbollah's reputation as a powerful organization with impressive military capabilities both within and outside of Lebanon. (8)	Would weaken the status of the organization in Lebanon and would damage Nasrallah's aspirations to increase Hezbollah's political power in Lebanon. (–7)	9
Relations with Syria	Would strengthen relations with Syria because it would enable Hezbollah to fill the void following Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, which would be is in the common interest of both sides. (7)	Would strengthen the relations Syria as this option is in both sides' interest (6)	Relations with Syria would likely be unaffected (0)	General relations with Syria would not be affected, but the degree of military coordination between Hezbollah and the state might increase. (0)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	Relations with Iran could be strained because the Iranian leadership would likely put pressure on Nasrallah to carry out successful terrorist attacks at the right moment, which would serve Iranian interests (9)	Would strengthen relations with Iran since the success of such an attack would serve the interests of both sides equally (9)	Would strengthen relations with Iran since the success of such an attack would serve the interests of both sides equally (9)	This alternative would damage relations with Iran Because it does not advance Iran's interests (−8)	7
Military	Hezbollah would enhance its military capabilities and strengthen its deterrent capability for the next round of fighting (10)	A successful attack against Israeli targets would strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah. However, escalation of the conflict, if Israel was to react, could cause great damage to the organization, especially to its military wing (6)	A successful attack against Israeli targets would strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah However, escalation of the conflict, if Israel was to react, could cause great damage to the organization, especially to its military wing (6)	Although this alternative would strengthen Hezbollah's deterrent capacity with respect to Israel, another war with Israel would likely lead to serious damage to the organization's military capabilities (−7)	7
	30.6 (max)	28.8	24.9	−12.3	

As we know, Nasrallah decided to act according to all of these alternatives. However, what is interesting is that the priority given to each alternative followed the calculation above: strategic and military build-up was given the highest priority.

In September 2004, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1559, which included calling for the disarmament of all militias within Lebanon. This decision created pressure on both Syria (the demands for its withdrawal from Lebanon increased) and Hezbollah. This pressure eventually led to the murder of Prime Minister Hariri, shortly after he left office. The murder turned out to be a double-edged sword, bringing internal and external pressure that led to the withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Lebanon (Henkin 2014). Nevertheless, the strategic military build-up continued and intensified with the backing of the Lebanese leadership (Norton 2007; Samaan 2014). In the years following the 2006 conflict, Hezbollah focused on this revised strategic calculus. The organization

invested in rockets and missiles with improved range and accuracy, while acquiring air defense systems (Samaan 2014, 28). The logic was to strengthen the group's ability to strike Israel deep inside its territory and to enhance its ability to mitigate, or at least absorb, the impact of an Israeli bombing campaign through defensive means (Samaan 2014, 28).

Despite the fact that military build-up was of central interest to Hezbollah in the years 2005–2008, Hezbollah also operated around the world in general, and in the Middle East in particular. In this context, Egypt was the first priority because of its strategic importance. This could be the reason for the high rating that this alternative received in the overall calculation. In parallel, Nasrallah tried to maximize his goals by acting according to the next alternative and expanding activity in the ring countries. After the exposure of Hezbollah's cell in Egypt, Nasrallah stepped up his efforts to operate in more remote countries located beyond the ring countries. Here too, one can see the pragmatism that characterizes both the organization's policy and Nasrallah's decision-making. In order to advance the organization's goals, Nasrallah worked to incorporate the benefits from different alternatives as circumstances changed. So once the cell in Egypt was exposed, he acted quickly, moving to the next alternative, which involved expanding activity beyond the ring countries.

Nasrallah's decision to deepen Hezbollah military activity in Southern Lebanon (2009)

During 2009, incidents in South Lebanon revealed that Hezbollah had returned to its regular military–terrorist activities in the Eastern sector of South Lebanon. In violating the resolution adopted by the UN Security council, Hezbollah used a modus operandi familiar from the period before the second Lebanon war. Three incidents are particularly relevant. On December 26, 2009, a force belonging to UNIFIL's Spanish brigade discerned the movement of suspicious individuals in an open area of Mazraat Sarda, South of the Shi'ite village of Al-Khiyam in the Eastern sector of South Lebanon.[6] Searches conducted by UNIFIL forces and the Lebanese army, which also arrived at the scene, revealed a number of explosive pits containing dozens of improvised explosive device (IEDs) of various types, weighing a total of about 300 kg, or 660 lbs.

An initial investigation showed that they were not improvised devices but rather advanced, standard, industrially mass-produced bombs. A comparison of the IEDs found to those used by Hezbollah against the IDF and others in the past made it likely that Hezbollah was responsible for placing them near the Israeli border. Another incident occurred on October 12, 2009. There was a loud explosion at the house of Hezbollah operative Sayid Issa in the village of Tair Filsay, 15 km, Northeast of the Lebanese city of Tyre, South of the Litani River.[7] The house served as an arms cache for Hezbollah, and the explosion apparently injured several Lebanese, including the owner of the house. A third incident occurred on July 14, 2009 with an explosion in an abandoned building on the outskirts of the village of Khirbet Silim, North of Bint Jbeil about 15 km from the Israeli border. The building served as a warehouse for Hezbollah weapons, including rockets, machine gun ammunition, and mortar and artillery shells.

In both cases the organization tried to minimize the importance of the incident, blaming Israel for the explosions. According to Israeli Air Force film released by the IDF, Hezbollah was quick to contain the events and cover up the evidence, proving it maintained an arms cache in a civilian area and thus violated UN Security Council Resolution 1701. These three events indicate that, since the end of the second Lebanon war, Hezbollah has been intensively rebuilding its military infrastructure in South Lebanon. When examining Nasrallah's decision to deepen Hezbollah military activity in Southern Lebanon, we assume his alternatives were as followed:

1 *Focus on strategic military build-up in Lebanon*. This would enable Nasrallah to continue to strengthen the strategic array of the organization and its military capabilities, and to improve its deterrence capability against Israel.
2 *Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad*. This would require planning, intelligence gathering, allocation of financial and human resources and extra caution after the discovery of a Hezbollah cell in Egypt. On the other hand, the success of such an attack abroad would get significant attention, strengthening the organization's image.
3 *Attack military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border*. This option would allow Nasrallah to control of the intensity and timing of the attacks according to Hezbollah's interests, which are affected by the

changing circumstances. However, these attacks could easily escalate into full-scale military conflict if Israel decided to react.

4 *Full-scale military conflict*. Use all (or almost all) of Hezbollah's available military resources to attack Israel and create maximum damage to its civilians. This would likely lead to war with Israel.

As Table 4.14 indicates, the fourth alternative—full-scale military conflict with Israel—is immediately disqualified, per the poliheuristic theory, because of the damage it would cause to the non-compensatory public–political dimension. Nasrallah's political ambitions and his desire to strengthen the organization's political standing before the expected elections on June 2009, led him to adopt a more conservative policy and thus he avoided full-scale conflict with Israel. Even from a strictly rational point of view, this alternative provided the least utility to the organization in general and to Nasrallah in particular, both in terms of the military and religious dimensions. So, Nasrallah was left with three alternatives: focus on strategic build-up, which would include expansion of Hezbollah military activity in Southern Lebanon; initiate attacks against Israeli targets abroad; or attack military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border. In a comprehensive calculation, the first two alternatives would be the most profitable to Hezbollah's interests. Even though the third alternative could strengthen Nasrallah's personal dimension, it would damage relations with Iran, which might explain why Nasrallah disregarded this alternative. As in Nasrallah's decision following the assassination of Imad Moughnieh (2008), we can see the significant impact of the relationship with Iran on Nasrallah's decision-making process.

In retrospect, Nasrallah decided to combine the first two alternatives: he focused on strategic build-up, including an expansion of Hezbollah military activity in Southern Lebanon while initiating attacks against Israeli targets abroad.[8,9] The question that remains to be asked at this point is why he did this. To answer this question it is essential to understand the background that preceded the decision. The year 2008 marked the culmination of the struggle between the Lebanese state and Hezbollah when violent clashes broke out between Hezbollah and the Lebanese army and the state's Christian and Druze factions. At the end of 18 months of struggle, Hezbollah finally got the upper hand but the pressure on the organization increased (Levi 2016). Furthermore, the upcoming presidential elections in Lebanon increased the

organization’s efforts to re-establish itself within the Lebanese political system.

Nasrallah’s political vision and the pragmatism he adopted were based, to a large extent, on an Iranian decision to create a new atmosphere in Lebanon that would allow it to act unmolested (Shapira 2009). After the Second Lebanon War, which erupted due to Israeli maneuvering and caught Hezbollah by surprise, Iran ordered Hezbollah to restrain activities against Israel and to intensify its integration into the political life of the Lebanese state (Shapira 2009). To the political constraints and the influence of Iran was added the exposure of the Hezbollah cell in Egypt at the end of 2008. Since 2008, Hezbollah has participated actively in Iran’s global terrorist campaign against Israel, including the attempted attack on the Israeli embassy in Baku, Azerbaijan, in May 2008. The exposure of Hezbollah’s cell in Egypt and Hezbollah’s lack of success in exporting attacks abroad, made Nasrallah realize that a combination of the two alternatives would maximize his chance of achieving the organization’s goals.

Table 4.14 Nasrallah's decision to deepen Hezbollah military activity in Southern Lebanon (2009)

	Focus on strategic build-up and expansion of Hezbollah military activity in Southern Lebanon	*Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad*	*Attack military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border*	*Full-scale military conflict*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Could weaken Nasrallah's position inside the organization because strategic build-up itself is not enough to restore the organization's image, even though increasing activity is important for his status and for raising the motivation and sense of ability of the organization's members (5)	A successful attack abroad, would significantly strengthen Nasrallah's position inside the organization, and would strengthen the organization's members' motivation. (9)	Would strengthen Nasrallah's position inside the organization and would satisfy the desire of Hezbollah members to avenge Mughnieh's assassination the year before. (9)	May strengthen Nasrallah's position as a strong, fearless leader. However, as the damage to both Hezbollah forces and the civilian population grows, he could face significant criticism for his aggressive response (6)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	On the one hand, strategic build up which includes the expansion of Hezbollah military activity in Southern Lebanon, could establish Nasrallah's status as the force protecting the citizens of Lebanon. On the other hand, the presence of Hezbollah in the villages in order to blend into the civilian population could lead to criticism inside and outside Lebanon due to the risk to the lives of civilians and the violation of Resolution 1701. (2)	A successful attack abroad would significantly strengthen Hezbollah's reputation as a strong global organization (8)	Would strengthen Hezbollah's reputation. However, it would also provoke criticism among opponents of the organization, mainly because of the fear of escalation. This could damage Hezbollah's political standing (3)	Could weaken the position of the organization because of the excessive reaction of Nasrallah. In addition, criticism would be expected (not only from the organization's opponents), and it would only increase as the damage to both Hezbollah forces and the civilian population grows (–6)	9
Relations with Syria	This alternative is unlikely to affect relations with Syria (0)	This alternative is unlikely to affect relations with Syria (0)	This alternative is unlikely to affect relations with Syria, even though military coordination between them would be expected to increase (0)	This alternative is unlikely to affect relations with Syria, even though military coordination between them would be expected to increase (0)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	Would strengthen the relationship with Iran because it would be compatible with Iran's expectations of the organization (Shapira, 2009) (10)	Iran is looking for strict silence in the Lebanese arena in order to enable Hezbollah to reconstruct its strategic capabilities in Lebanon. This alternative would not harm relations with Iran since the success of such an attack would serve the interests of both sides equally (9)	Would damage relations with Iran since Iran is looking for silence in the Lebanese arena to enable Hezbollah to reconstruct its strategic capabilities in Lebanon. This would allow the organization to make use of these capabilities at a time to be determined by Tehran (Shapira, 2009) (–4)	This alternative would severely damage relations with Iran. (–8)	7
Military	Would strengthen Hezbollah's military condition. It will allow Nasrallah to reorganize the command and control system of the organization and to increase his arsenal and deterrence capability, after the damage that was done to it following the 2006 war with Israel. (10)	Would strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah in Israel and the Western world in general (7)	Would strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah against Israel since Nasrallah would show a willingness to execute his threats. However, escalation of the conflict could cause great damage to the organization in general, and to its military wing in particular. (3)	Although this option would maintain Hezbollah's deterrent power against Israel, another war with Israel would significantly reduce the organization's military capabilities. (–7)	7
Weighted total	20.3	26.5 (max)	10.1	–10.5	

Nasrallah's decision on indirect intervention in Syria (2011–2012)

The process Nasrallah used to reach a final decision on Hezbollah's involvement in Syria was gradual, tentative and conditioned upon the events taking place during the war in Syria. At the beginning of the Arab Spring in late 2010, Hezbollah welcomed the Arab awakening and revolution, championing "the poor who seek freedom" (Berti and Schweitzer 2013).[10]

Nasrallah's support was evident in Egypt and Bahrain, and even at the beginning of the wave of political protests against the Assad regime in the spring of 2011, when he expressed the need for reform in Syria (Berti and Schweitzer 2013, 41). As the internal conflict in Syria between the rebels and the regime escalated, Nasrallah began publicly providing political support to Assad and providing secret military counsel. As part of an undeclared policy of minimizing public involvement, Nasrallah also denied the role of Hezbollah in Syria on several occasions.[11] Nasrallah's secrecy says much about his unwillingness to risk either his own position or the political status of the organization in developing a response to the situation in Syria.

In light of the emerging civil war in Syria, Nasrallah faced the following alternatives:

1 *Avoid public support (presumably by providing secret assistance to the Assad regime in Syria)*. Sitting on the sidelines and avoiding public declarations of support for the Assad regime could allow Nasrallah to watch from the shadows and wait for the appropriate moment to act. Providing military advice to Syria in secret would allow Nasrallah to learn more about what was happening on the ground in Syria without being exposed to public criticism and risking his political position.

2 *Provide political support and military advice*. Political support for the Assad regime is only natural for Nasrallah and presumably would not surprise the Lebanese public. In addition, indirect involvement in the events in Syria, including sending a small amount of military forces that would engage primarily in consulting, would not bring Nasrallah to a military or political point of no return (especially if public statements clarified that involvement in Syria was only indirect).

3 *Limited intervention: minimal and careful military assistance*. Although this would be a dramatic change to the policy of the organization that could create waves of criticism in the Lebanese society, it could be crucial for maintaining the Triple Alliance (with Iran and Syria), and could serve as an opportunity to leverage and significantly increase the military strength of the organization and its deterrent power against Israel (in return for helping the Assad regime).

4 *Extensive active participation in the fighting in Syria*. Nasrallah could decide to go "all in," assuming that it is a relatively safe bet that he

would be rewarded greatly by Iran and Syria. This is a decision that could bear fruit in the long term.

Given their low scores on the two core dimensions, two of the alternatives—limited intervention and active, extensive participation in the fighting in Syria—were disqualified in the first stage of the decision-making process. Nasrallah feared strengthening internal criticism through extensive involvement in Syria and the consequences that could occur if Hezbollah was to maintain this radical policy over the long term. Direct and extensive involvement in Syria by Hezbollah could also lead to public criticism that would undermine the legitimacy of the organization, even among its supporters in Lebanon. Hezbollah casualties could serve as a tool for the anti-Syrian camp in Lebanon to attack the organization and to frighten the Lebanese public into believing that the war would move from Syria to Lebanon.

Thus, two remaining alternatives faced Nasrallah: abstention from public support for Syria (but presumably providing military consultation) or giving political support and providing open military consultation to Syria (indirect intervention). Of the two remaining alternatives, Nasrallah had a clear preference for providing political support and military advice (indirect involvement), both along the personal dimension and when considering the total expected utility. This alternative clearly strengthened the position of Nasrallah within the organization given its alignment with Hezbollah's pro-Syrian policy and the commitment of the organization to the Shi'ites in Lebanon and abroad. This alternative would also minimize military risk, as it required no more than the provision of consultation, while simultaneously allowing for the maintenance of relatively close ties with Syria and Iran, both of whom support the organization financially and militarily.

Even when considering the alternatives from a strictly rational perspective, this option was preferable to the other alternatives. In Nasrallah's eyes, indirect involvement would allow him to make minimal concessions and to get maximum benefit from the situation. The possible concessions that he might make included the allocation of limited forces for military and security consulting with negligible risk of exacerbation of ethnic political tensions in Lebanon, and a few concerns about criticism regarding the organization's support for the Assad regime from the anti-Syrian camp in Lebanon. The gains in this case were greater than the losses because choosing this alternative allowed Nasrallah to strengthen his

position in the organization, to maintain the status of the organization within Lebanon, to preserve close ties with Syria and Iran, and to maintain loyalty to the ideology and religious principles of the organization and of Nasrallah himself.

Nasrallah's decision to use indirect intervention is consistent with both poliheuristic theory and the expected utility decision rule. Although this makes it difficult to determine the rule that led Nasrallah to choose the second option, we may learn something by examining the five dimensions. While the third option scored especially well on the last three dimensions (the relations with Syria, religious, and military dimensions), the second performed significantly better on the first two. That is to say, the most significant considerations for Nasrallah were the organizational–personal and the public–political dimensions. Given the poliheuristic perspectives emphasis on the importance of politics, this provides some tentative support for the poliheuristic approach.

Nasrallah's decision to attack in Burgas, Bulgaria (2012)

The 2012 Hezbollah bombing of a tourist bus in Bulgaria was the organization's first success in a global terrorist campaign waged against Israel, following a series of failed and thwarted attacks (in Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Thailand). In this attack, as in several other attacks and attempts since 2008,[12] Hezbollah served as a proxy for the Quds Force, an elite unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which considered Hezbollah to be the spearhead of Iranian terror abroad. In order to carry out attacks on foreign soil, Hezbollah established a dedicated attack mechanism called The Unit for Overseas Operations, which it used to distance the larger organization from the unit's activities. The responsibly for this unit lay on Nasrallah himself and every foreign attack required his direct approval.[13]

While Iran viewed the attack as a response to the "soft war" being waged against it and a means of strengthening its bargaining leverage with respect to the US, Israel and the West, Hezbollah saw it as a way to avenge the death of Imad Mughniyeh and to deter Israel from additional aggressive action in fighting terrorism or striking Iran's nuclear program. However, in trying to accomplish these goals, Nasrallah faced a substantial risk, as Israeli reaction and escalation would be inevitable.

In light of the above, Nasrallah was faced with the following alternatives:

1 *Focus on the Syrian arena only*. The outbreak of civil war in Syria added to the complexity of the political and security environment of Hezbollah. Because of the uncertainty about the situation in Syria and its possible consequences for Hezbollah, it could be beneficial to focus on the Syrian arena alone, rather than taking steps that could open another front against Israel.
2 *Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad*. Because Hezbollah serves as an Iranian proxy, a terror campaign abroad would strengthen Iran's strategic bargaining capabilities, while helping the organization to get revenge for the death of senior Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh and the killing of Iranian nuclear scientists (for both of which Iran and Hezbollah blamed Israel). It would also allow the group to deter Israel (as well as the US and other Western powers) from taking other actions against it.
3 *Deliberate escalation, involving attacks against targets within Israel's borders*. This would strengthen Hezbollah's deterrent capability but could easily deteriorate into full-scale military conflict.

Of the three alternatives given in Table 4.15, the "deliberate escalation" option was immediately disqualified because of its negative impact on the public–political dimension. The two remaining alternatives, "Focus on strategic build-up" and "Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad," passed to the second stage of the decision-making process. There, the "Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad" alternative was left with the highest overall score, and was the option selected by Nasrallah.

In analyzing Nasrallah's decision, two important factors stand out as having had an influence on the two core dimensions (the personal–organizational and the public–political): the ongoing civil war in Syria and its possible implication on Lebanon, and Nasrallah's desire to rebuild Hezbollah's reputation. Furthermore, the attempts by Iran and Hezbollah to attack Israeli tourist groups and Israeli diplomats around the world reflect the willingness of both parties to take risks, even at the cost of possible escalation with Israel.

Nasrallah's decision on direct limited intervention in Syria (2013)

The decision to become directly involved (albeit to a limited extent) in the fighting in Syria was an escalation of Hezbollah's policy, even compared to other periods throughout its history. The decision was not spontaneous, and was the result of changing circumstances and events that took place in Syria following Nasrallah's decision to engage in indirect involvement in Syria a year earlier. Presumably, in other circumstances, Nasrallah might not have risked direct intervention. In this case, however, he saw it as necessary to preserve both the strength of the organization and his own personal status (Berti and Schweitzer 2013). Alongside Nasrallah's close relationship with the Assad regime were many other interests, including the central role played by the Syrian military in the build-up of Hezbollah's warfighting capabilities. The Syrian military helped Nasrallah to enhance his offensive capabilities and his deterrent capacity against Israel, served as a safe path for the transfer of weapons and provided logistical support to the organization. Moreover, it was instrumental in maintaining the Iran–Syria–Hezbollah Triple Alliance. Thus, the Syrian revolution and the overthrow of the Assad regime would be detrimental to Hezbollah's interests. Additionally, prior to Nasrallah's decision, Iranian officials pressured him, throwing the burden of assisting the Syrian regime upon Hezbollah. Interestingly, Nasrallah faced the same alternatives that he had a year earlier. But the context in which he made his decision had changed. Nasrallah's alternatives were, once again, the following:

Table 4.15 Nasrallah's decision re the attack in Israelis at Burgas, Bulgaria (2012)

	Focus on the Syrian arena only	*Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad*	*Deliberate escalation—to attack targets in Israel and its borders*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Would weaken Nasrallah's position because of the long period in which Hezbollah would record no great successes, despite its attempts to carry out terrorist attacks abroad. Nevertheless, because Hezbollah was part of the Iranian effort (led by the Quds Force) to prevent the overthrow of the Syrian regime, the organization's members were more concerned about what was happening in the Syrian arena (–5)	A successful attack abroad would significantly strengthen Nasrallah's position both within and outside of the organization, and would satisfy the desire of Hezbollah members to avenge Mughnieh's assassination, strengthening their motivation (10)	This option would reinforce Nasrallah's position in the short term, but at the same time would generate criticism from within the organization, which would only increase as the inevitable conflict with Israel escalated. The criticism would arise because this is a dramatic step and the threats to Lebanon from the ongoing war in Syria make the situation complex and dangerous. (5)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Would weaken Nasrallah's position because of the long period in which Hezbollah would record no great successes, despite its attempts to carry out terrorist attacks abroad. However, Lebanese society was closely following developments in Syria, and was concerned about their possible implications for Lebanon. Such a decision could therefore strengthen Hezbollah's position within Lebanon. (–3)	A successful attack abroad would significantly strengthen Hezbollah's reputation as a strong organization that could protect Lebanon's interests as well as its civilians. It would be particularly important, in light of the situation in Syria and fears of spillover from the civil war into Lebanon. (8)	Would weaken the position of the organization in Lebanon because of the threat from war on two fronts (Syria and Israel) and associated collateral damage among Lebanese civilians. (–8)	9
Relations with Syria	No change would be expected with respect to relations with Syria.[14] (0)	No change would be expected with respect to relations with Syria. (0)	Could result in strained relations with Syria. Assad's regime might fear that war between Hezbollah and Israel would reduce Nasrallah's commitment to the Syrian regime. (–5)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	Relations with Iran could be strained because the Iranian leadership would likely put pressure on Nasrallah to carry out successful terrorist attacks, which would serve Iranian interests. However, cooperation between the two would continue to be close (5)	Would strengthen relations with Iran since the success of such an attack would serve the interests of both sides equally (9)	Would strengthen relations with Iran since the success of such an attacks would serve the interests of both sides equally (9)	7
Military	Hezbollah would enhance its military capabilities and strengthen its deterrent capability for the next round of fighting (10)	Would Strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah in Israel and the Western world in general. However, escalation of the conflict, if Israel was to react, could cause great damage to the organization, especially to its military wing. (7)	Although this alternative would strengthen Hezbollah's deterrent capacity with respect to Israel, another war with Israel would be likely to lead to serious damage to the organization's military capabilities (–7)	7
	3.3	27.4 (max)	–5.3	

1 *Avoid public support (presumably providing secret assistance to the Assad regime in Syria)*. Avoiding public support is a decision in itself, given the dramatic escalation of the civil war in Syria and especially in light of Nasrallah's previous decision to provide political support and military advice to Syria. While this would not affect the organization's policy of military assistance to Syria, because it can be supplied through secret channels, the reservation of political support would be a reduction of the organization's involvement, and would have significant political repercussions both within Lebanon and with respect to the relationship with the organization's allies, Syria and Iran.

2 *Provide political support and military advice (indirect involvement)*. This is a continuation of the previous policy, but due to changing circumstances and the precarious position of the Assad regime, it is likely that maintaining this policy would satisfy neither Syria nor Iran.

3 *Limited intervention: minimal and careful military aid (direct involvement)*. This option comprises direct involvement in the fighting, which would deepen Hezbollah's commitment. Although this alternative would meet the demands of Syria and Iran, it would likely

provoke public criticism of the organization and of Nasrallah personally.

4 *Extensive active participation in the fighting in Syria*. This is Nasrallah's most dramatic option. This alternative brings with it significant risk to Nasrallah's position within the organization, as well as his status and legitimacy within Lebanese society, as it implies "putting all of his eggs into one basket."

Two of the alternatives among which Nasrallah was making his decision included significant negative repercussions on the political–public and the personal–organizational dimensions. The first alternative, abstention from public support to Syria, necessitated a retreat from Nasrallah's previous statements on the importance of assistance to Syria and the elimination of the rebel forces. Such an action could be interpreted as indecision, damaging the status of Nasrallah in the organization and within Lebanese society in general. Because the situation in Syria had only escalated over the past year, it would be difficult for Nasrallah to provide satisfactory explanations for the change in attitude, leading his decision to be viewed as little more than cowardice. Anti-Syrian forces could take advantage of the decline in the position of Nasrallah to criticize him for his previous decisions. Among the pro-Syrian faction, public criticism could be expected to hurt the organization following the repudiation of the alliance with Syria. The fourth alternative, active participation in the fighting in Syria, was also rejected by Nasrallah, as it would have substantially diminished Nasrallah's status within the organization as the number of dead and wounded rose during the battles in Syria. It would also reduce the organization's status and legitimacy within Lebanon because of the fear of "sinking in the Syrian mud" and the fear that the sectarian religious conflict could travel from Syria to Lebanon.

Table 4.16 Nasrallah's decision on direct limited intervention in Syria 2013

	Abstention from public support to Syria (presumably providing military consultation to Syria)	*Giving political support and providing military consultation to Syria—indirect intervention*	*Limited intervention—minimal military aid*	*Active participation in the fighting in Syria*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Reduces involvement relative to previous decision, and could undermine Nasrallah's position within the organization. May be interpreted as flip-flopping from previous decisions and actions. Perceived cowardice and indecision could lead to serious harm to his standing within the organization. This could damage the morale of the group as well. Continuing to provide military advice would slightly offset the expected damage (–7)	This option is unlikely to affect Nasrallah's standing within the organization to a significant degree. Interior forces would support the expansion of organizational involvement in Syria, while other forces would support maintaining the status quo (–2).	Possible damage to Nasrallah's standing in the organization as the amount of dead and wounded accumulate. However, because this option would limit involvement, and represents a continuation of Nasrallah's declared policy, it could reinforce his image as a leader who is determined, reliable, faithful to his principles, and not afraid to take risks (–2)	This option would lead to public criticism of Nasrallah as the number of Hezbollah casualties accumulates, damaging his position within the organization (–8)	9

Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	This would likely harm the status of Hezbollah among the Lebanese population. While this alternative could generate support from the opponents of involvement in Syria and the opponents of Syrian involvement in Lebanon (the March 14 camp), it would likely harm relations with the pro-Syrian Lebanese parties (the March 8 camp), with which Hezbollah had political alliances (–9)	This alternative would not adversely affect either the public legitimacy or the political status of the organization within Lebanon (6)	Although this option would be unlikely to gain Hezbollah votes (due to electoral sectarianism in Lebanon), it could generate additional criticism from opponents. The more limited Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, and the fewer casualties suffered by the organization, the less likely that Hezbollah would lose support within Lebanon (–2)	This alternative would damage the status and legitimacy of the organization. The draining of popular support (following a dramatic deviation from the original goals of the organization and an increase in the number of dead and injured), along with the deepening rift with political allies and growing tensions as a result of the civil war in Syria would severely damage Hezbollah's position in Lebanon. However, even here, the protection of Alawites and Shi'ites in Syria could prevent spread of the ethnic conflict in Lebanon and reduce future damage to the organization's political status (–8)	9

Relations with Syria	This would severely damage relations with Syria because it is a policy retreat from previous resolutions. The usefulness of military advice is negligible, given the problematic situation of the Assad regime (–9)	Relations with Syria would be damaged. Although this is a continuation of previous policy, the Assad regime required extensive assistance following the escalation of the civil war, the Assad regime's failure to defeat the rebel forces, and the erosion of Syrian forces in the "hot zones" (–6)	Limited involvement would maintain positive relations with Syria. But if the Syrian army suffered major losses and was significantly weakened, limited involvement might create tensions and generate demands from Assad to deepen and expand the involvement (8)	This option would strengthen relations with the Assad regime. Hezbollah's military contribution would be crucial for Assad and provide much-needed support for the exhausted Syrian army, which could tip the balance in favor of the Assad regime (10)	8
Religious (relations with Iran)	This alternative would severely damage relations with Iran. Even if Nasrallah provided an explanation to the Iranian authorities on the need to reduce involvement in Syria, it would be unwelcome. This decision would be interpreted as a rejection of the religious and ethnic base of Hezbollah and of the solidarity displayed by the members of Hezbollah and Shi'ite Alawite sect in Syria (–9)	Given the pressure placed on Hezbollah by Iran to deepen and broaden involvement in Syria and to help the beleaguered Syrian regime, Nasrallah's refusal to do so would escalate tensions with Iran (–5)	This choice would preserve relations with Iran and demonstrate loyalty to the ideological religious principles of Hezbollah (10)	This option strengthens relations with Iran because Hezbollah would demonstrate its willingness to sacrifice in order to advance Iranian interests in the region (10)	7

Military	This would be a serious blow to Hezbollah's military build-up, given its economic and military dependence on Iran and Syria, especially in the long term. Providing military consultation in light of these circumstances would not satisfy either the Assad or the Iranian regime, and could lead to economic and military sanctions on Hezbollah (–9)	This would have the potential to damage Hezbollah's ability to build its military power. Because Nasrallah had already made some statements in support of the Assad regime in the current campaign, maintaining the organization's status quo policy of Hezbollah would not be enough to satisfy the Syrians and the Iranians, who would reduce economic and military assistance given to the organization (–5)	This option would strengthen the military power and capabilities of Hezbollah in both the short and long term. It would allow Nasrallah to demand more from Iran and Syria in compensation for Hezbollah's assistance to the Assad regime. On the other hand, the involvement of Hezbollah forces in the fighting in Syria could have a negative effect on the group's military power. However, aforesaid military and economic aid from Iran and Syria would mitigate the impact, so that it would not reduce Hezbollah's ability to combat Israel. Additionally, sending Hezbollah fighters to Syria would allow them to gain significant experience in combat and the planning of military operations (9)	This alternative could potentially diminish Hezbollah's military power, the morale of its fighters, and its deterrence capability—at least in the short run—as a result of intense and prolonged fighting in Syria. However, Hezbollah could expect to receive adequate compensation from Iran and Syria for its sacrifices. Additionally, sending Hezbollah fighters to Syria would allow them to gain significant experience in combat and the planning of military operations (5)	7
Weighted total	–34.2	–8.2	16.1 (max)	4.1	

In the second stage of Nasrallah's decision process, after comparing the two remaining alternatives along the remaining dimensions, there was a clear winner in the choice of direct limited involvement. Choosing the alternative of limited military intervention would allow the preservation of close relations with Iran and Syria and allow Nasrallah to demand compensation from Iran and Syria for the organization's assistance to the

Assad regime, in the form of arms and tie-breaker weapons to help Hezbollah in a future campaign against Israel.

In Table 4.16, it is clear that, despite the possible damage to Nasrallah's status within the organization and the status of the organization within the Lebanese political arena, direct, limited involvement stood out as the preferred choice given the circumstances.[15] Nasrallah faced potential political losses on all four alternatives, and limited involvement stood out as the lesser evil. While limited intervention ranked lower than indirect intervention on the crucial public–political dimension, the difference was not sufficient to rule it out, and it maintained a large enough lead when taking the other dimensions into account that it stood out as the optimal choice. Furthermore, the fourth alternative—which graded highest along the religious dimension and with respect to relations with Syria—was rejected out of hand at the first stage of the process, despite finishing with the second-highest overall score.

Although Nasrallah faced the same set of alternatives in 2012 and 2013, the situation had changed dramatically. This change led him to select a different option in the latter case. His decision to involve the organization directly marked the first time that Hezbollah fought openly outside of Lebanon. The drastic change implied by this decision is underscored when looking at Hezbollah's behavior 2 years earlier. At the time, Nasrallah refrained from making public statements that supported the Assad regime and did not announce engagement in Syria. The difficult situation facing Assad's regime when fighting in Syria, coupled with growing pressure from Iran, tipped the scales in favor of escalation, which can explain the transition from Nasrallah's initial choice of indirect involvement to the later decision on direct military involvement within Syria.[16]

Nasrallah's decision on active participation in the fighting in Syria (2015)

The years 2014–2015 were characterized by a worsening of the war in Syria. Assad lost control over important parts of the country, the Syrian army was exhausted, having lost many of its warriors, the number of refugees was expanding because of the unbearable conditions the population faced, and there was substantial uncertainty about the future of the Assad regime. This complex situation and the dangers confronting the regime (especially the

possibility that battles would spread to Lebanon as the noose around Assad's neck tightened) had a great impact on Nasrallah's decision-making process. Of course, he was also influenced by concerns among Iran's leadership that Assad was losing his grip on power. In addition, Hezbollah had to deal with the "takfir threat" and the rise of Salafi Jihadist forces in Lebanon. The importance of these threats was made apparent in Nasrallah's speeches, where he attempted to create a political lobby, claiming that the Salafi Jihadist forces in Lebanon were directly threatening to the country's national security.

Even within the Lebanese political arena Nasrallah faced great challenges. The presidential vacuum created as a result of Michel Suleiman's departure from the president's residence, coupled with the inability of the two major political coalitions to agree on an acceptable candidate, deepened the polarization inside of Lebanon and weakened the country's political system even more.

Nasrallah faced the same set of alternatives for a third time, though his motivation, and ultimately his decision, had changed. Once again, the alternatives that confronted Nasrallah were:

1 *Avoid public support (presumably providing secret assistance to the Assad regime in Syria)*. Given the dramatic escalation of the civil war in Syria and the real threat to the survival of Assad's regime, this alternative would have a significant impact on all of the core dimensions. Its implications would be even more significant in light of the last two decisions, which represented a gradual escalation of Hezbollah's intervention in Syria.
2 *Provide political support and military advice (indirect involvement)*. While this alternative would not be expected to have significant effects in the short term, it would likely increase long-term criticism both within the organization and from the Syrian and Iranian regimes, as embracing this policy of indirect involvement would reduce Hezbollah's level of involvement, diminishing both the organization's and Nasrallah's general level of regard among allies.
3 *Limited intervention: minimal and careful military aid (direct involvement)*. While this alternative was mostly a continuation of Nasrallah's 2013 decision, it was not an obvious choice, given the altered circumstances. Yet, limited intervention would provide

Nasrallah with greater maneuverability in light of the uncertainty that characterized the rapidly changing situation in the region.

4 *Extensive active participation in the fighting in Syria*. This remained the most extreme option, with a substantial risk for Nasrallah, in terms of his personal position within the organization, and for the organization in terms of its status and legitimacy with respect to Lebanese society. The fact that the decision would also necessitate military deployment would have a great impact on Hezbollah's position elsewhere as well. This option would make it difficult for Nasrallah to maneuver if the circumstances were to change.

Table 4.17 shows that of the four alternatives that Nasrallah faced, two were detrimental across all five dimensions, while the other two were more mixed and were ultimately closer to one another in terms of overall expected utility. The two first alternatives, abstention from public support to Syria and providing military consultation to Syria (indirect intervention), were disqualified initially due to their poor performance on the personal–organizational dimension. Because of the retreat from Nasrallah's former position, along with the changing circumstances in which Hezbollah found itself—specifically, the "takfir threat" and the rise of the Salafist Jihadist organizations within Lebanon—choosing either of those two alternatives would severely damage his position within the organization. After removing those options, two alternatives remained: limited intervention with minimal military aid and active participation in the fighting in Syria. The alternative of active participation in the fighting in Syria had the greatest upside on the personal–organizational dimension, as it would allow Nasrallah to showcase his strength as a strong leader who is not afraid to take risks in order to achieve the interests of the organization and to protect his people. As for the second core dimension, the public–political dimension, all of the alternatives received similar scores, due to the internal political situation in Lebanon, which had deteriorated due to the war in Syria, the entry of 2 million Syrian refugees to the state, and the absence of a president that could get the consent of both major coalitions.

Table 4.17 Nasrallah's decision on active participation in the fighting in Syria (2015)

	Abstention from public support to Syria (presumably providing military consultation to Syria)	*Giving political support and providing military consultation to Syria—indirect intervention*	*Limited intervention—minimal military aid*	*Active participation in the fighting in Syria*	*Wt.*
Organizational–Personal	Would be incompatible with his former decision and with his public declarations, which expressed strong support for the Assad regime. Could also be interpreted as weakness in light of the rising threat from Salafi Jihadist forces. Therefore, this option would greatly diminish his position both within and outside of the organization (–10)	Would weaken Nasrallah's position inside the organization because of the retreat from his previous policy. Could also be interpreted as weakness in light of aggression against the organization by Salafi Jihadist forces (–8)	Nasrallah's position inside and outside the organization would likely not be damaged severely as this option is effectively a continuation of the previous decision. However, there might be dissatisfaction among Hezbollah's warriors to deepen involvement in order to 'finish the job'. (–2)	Could strengthen Nasrallah's position within the organization, showing him to be a strong leader who is not afraid to take risks and who is loyal to his supporters (including the Alawites and the Shiites in Syria). However, significant Hezbollah casualties could beget criticism of Nasrallah. (4)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Could ameliorate unrest stemming from the weakened political system in Lebanon and criticism against Hezbollah for allowing the war to spread from Syria. However, Hezbollah's supporters might perceive this alternative as a sign of unreliability. (–3)	Could reduce unrest from the weakened political system, but would generate dissatisfaction among the organization's supporters for Nasrallah's desertion of the Assad regime and his failure to remain true to Hezbollah's ideology. (–2)	Could increase public criticism because of the complex political situation in Lebanon (due to the presidential power vacuum) and because Hezbollah would bear responsibility for "importing" the war from Syria to Lebanon. Most of Hezbollah's supporters would likely remain loyal, believing the organization to be the population's only hope. (–4)	Would lead to military casualties as well as criticism, as Hezbollah would be spending time and resources in Syria while abandoning the Lebanese political arena, as well as "importing" the war from Syria to Lebanon. On the other hand, the empathy for Syrian citizens and the fear of a flood of additional Syrian refugees into Lebanon, as well as the fear of the rising Jihadi Salafist groups in the country would strengthen the population's faith in Hezbollah as the only organization capable of salvaging the situation within Lebanon (–2)	9

Relations with Syria	Would badly damage relations with the Assad regime as it would represent a fundamental change from the strong cooperation between them. Would be interpreted as a desertion given the problematic situation for Assad in Syria (–10)	Would damage the relationship with the Assad regime, but not irreparably. (–4)	May strengthen the relationship with Syria, but because of the challenges facing Assad's forces and the fact that he was fighting for his survival, he might put additional pressure on Nasrallah to deepen Hezbollah's involvement in the country. (6)	Would strengthen relations with Syria as it would demonstrate Hezbollah's willingness to pay a high price to help the Assad regime. Could also cause some tension if Hezbollah fighters try to take command of Syrian forces. (9)	8
Religious (relations with Iran)	Would severely damage relations with Iran, as well as with the Shiite (and Alawite) population in Syria. Contradicts the religious agenda of the organization (–10)	Would damage relations with Iran because Tehran would likely put great pressure on Hezbollah to deepen its involvement in the fighting. This pressure would only rise as the physical and political damage to the Shiite population in Syria increased (–5)	This option would maintain close cooperation with Iran and strengthen the alliance with the Shiites and Alawites in Syria. However, because of the difficulties facing Assad's forces and the threat to the regime's survival, Iran might increase pressure on Nasrallah to deepen Hezbollah's involvement in Syria (6)	Would strengthen relations with Iran by showing the price that the organization is willing to pay to promote Iranian interests in the region, one of which is to protect the Shiite and Alawite populations in Syria (10)	7

Military	Would reduce the military capability of Hezbollah because of the deteriorating relations with Syria and Iran. However, the break from fighting would give the organization time to rest and renew its forces. (−5)	Would damage Hezbollah's military capability and deterrence in the long term by reducing military aid from Iran and Syria. However it would also reduce the number of casualties incurred by the organization, allowing it to rest and renew its forces. (−2)	Would strengthen the military power and capability of Hezbollah in both the short and long terms. Would also allow Nasrallah to demand greater assistance from Iran and Syria in return for Hezbollah's aid to the Assad regime. Because of the limited nature of the intervention, military damage sustained in the fighting would likely be negligible. (9)	Hezbollah could expect to receive adequate compensation from Iran and Syria for its extensive involvement in the fighting. Additionally, sending fighters to Syria would allow them to gain significant experience in both combat and the planning of military operations. However, some casualties would be expected, which could damage the morale of the organization's fighters, and reduce its military capability, at least in the short term. (5)	7
Weighted total	−30.2	−17.1	9.9	19.5 (max)	

In the second stage of the decision-making process, the examination of overall expected utility among the remaining options, the fourth alternative (active participation in the fighting in Syria) had the highest overall score, despite the expected military costs that the organization would incur. Interestingly, the most extreme alternative, with the greatest potential for damage to Nasrallah's key personal–organizational dimension in both of the previous periods examined—2011–2012 and 2013 (see Tables 4.15 and 4.17)—was now his optimal choice. In this decision, the two-stage poliheuristic approach is beneficial in understanding Nasrallah's decision process. Furthermore, it is interesting note that the alternative with the highest score on the personal–organizational dimension in all the three resolutions was ultimately the alternative selected (in Table 4.16, there were two alternatives that tied for the highest score along this dimension).

Nasrallah's decision to respond moderately after the Israeli attack (2015)

On January 18, 2015, a convoy of Hezbollah terrorist operatives was attacked in Mazrat al-Amal in the Northern Golan Heights. According to reports, six Hezbollah operatives and six operatives of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were killed in the attack.[17] Among those killed were Jihad Mughnieh, son of the late Hezbollah leader, Imad Mughnieh, and Muhammad Ali Allahdadi, a senior commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. While Israel refrained from commenting, Hezbollah and Iranian sources promised to respond forcefully to the attack, which they claimed was carried out by Israel. A few days later, on the afternoon of January 27, 2015, two rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory in the Northern Golan Heights. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. The IDF responded with artillery fire attacking the source of the rocket fire and an Israeli Air Force aircraft then attacked Syrian army targets. Hezbollah was apparently behind the rocket fire, even if no organization officially claimed responsibility for it.[18]

On January 28, 2015, approximately 24 hours after the rocket fire in the Golan Heights, Hezbollah used anti-tank missiles—Kornet missiles, according to the media—and mortar shells to carry out a combined attack on an IDF patrol on the road near the village of Ghajar. The attack was launched from the region of Kafr Shuba, in the Eastern sector of South Lebanon (the Shebaa Farms). Two IDF soldiers were killed and seven wounded. Hezbollah took responsibility for the attack and, on January 30, 2015, Nasrallah gave a speech in which he called the attack “a huge victory” for Hezbollah. He claimed that Hezbollah did not want a war but that if forced into one, it would deal with it and would be victorious (*Alakhbar English* 2015; Perry and Bassam 2015). Ali Ja’fari, commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IIRG), claimed that Hezbollah’s response was minimalist and hoped it had taught the Israelis a lesson.

After the Israeli attack on January 18, 2015, Nasrallah was faced with the following alternatives:

1 *Do nothing*. The decision not to react to the Israeli attack would enable Hezbollah to continue on its strategic build-up and wait for the perfect opportunity to react.
2 *Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad*. The success of attacking Israeli targets abroad would strengthen the organization’s deterrence. However, it would take time before this

strategy could be implemented and until that happens, Hezbollah's deterrent capacity would be reduced.

3 *Launch an attack on military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border*. This would allow Nasrallah to control the intensity and timing of the attacks according to Hezbollah's interests. However, these attacks could easily escalate into full-scale military conflict if Israel decided to react.

4 *Full-scale military conflict*. This would use all (or almost all) of Hezbollah's available military resources to attack Israel and cause maximum damage to its civilians. This option would likely lead to war with Israel.

Consistent with the poliheuristic theory, during the first step of the analysis, two alternatives given in Table 4.18 were disqualified because of their low scores on core dimensions. The first alternative, which was to do nothing, was disqualified because of the damage it would cause to both organizational–personal and the public–political dimensions. The threats from Hezbollah and Iran, which were published in the media after the Israeli attack,[19] did not allow Nasrallah to refrain from responding to the Israeli attack without suffering severe reputational damage. The fourth alternative, full-scale conflict, was disqualified as well because of the damage it would cause to the public–political dimension. The escalation of the conflict with Israel, along with Hezbollah's intensive involvement in Syria, could provoke harsh criticism in Lebanon, which would harm Hezbollah's political standing.

Table 4.18 Nasrallah's decision to respond moderately after the Israeli attack (2015)

	Do nothing	*Initiate and take part in attacks against Israeli targets abroad*	*Launch an attack on military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border*	*Full-scale military conflict*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Would weaken Nasrallah's position in the organization, but not dramatically (–3)	A successful attack on Israeli targets abroad would strengthen Nasrallah's status, but such an attack requires prior planning and would take time to be implemented (5)	Would strengthen Nasrallah's status inside the organization and satisfy the desire of Hezbollah members to avenge the deaths of six Hezbollah operatives in Israeli attacks (9)	On the one hand, this could strengthen Nasrallah's position as a strong, fearless leader. On the other hand, significant Hezbollah casualties could provoke criticism of Nasrallah (3)	9
Public–Political (influence in Lebanon)	Would weaken Hezbollah's political standing in Lebanon due to threats made by Nasrallah and Iranian officials in the media after the attack, given these words would not be accompanied by actions (–4)	A successful attack on Israeli targets abroad would strengthen Hezbollah's political status, but it could take time to implement such an attack. (5)	Would strengthen Hezbollah's reputation. However, this might also provoke criticism among opponents of the organization, primarily because of the fear of escalation (6)	Would damage Hezbollah's political position and arouse criticism because of the excessive reaction of Nasrallah especially in light of Hezbollah's involvement in the war in Syria (–8)	9
Relations with Syria	Would not affect relations with Syria (0)	Would not affect relations with Syria (0)	General relations with Syria would not be affected, but the degree of military coordination between Hezbollah and the state might increase (0)	General relations with Syria would not be affected, but the degree of military coordination between Hezbollah and the state might increase (0)	8

Religious (relations with Iran)	This alternative would not satisfy Iran. Iran would want to strengthen its deterrent capability vis-à-vis Israel, because of the killing of six operatives of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the attack (–5)	Would strengthen relations with Iran since the success of such an attack would serve the interests of both sides equally (9)	Would strengthen relations with Iran since the success of such an attack would serve the interests of both sides equally (9)	Would weaken relations with Iran because Iran is not interested in escalation, which would lead to a full-scale conflict, at this point (–7)	7
Military	This alternative would not affect the military dimension (0)	If successful, this would strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah. However, escalation of the conflict, if Israel were to react, could damage Hezbollah's military wing. (8)	Would Strengthen the deterrent capability of Hezbollah against Israel, showing that Nasrallah is willing to execute his threats. However, escalation of the conflict could cause great damage to the organization in general, and to its military wing in particular. (6)	Although this alternative would maintain Hezbollah's deterrent power against Israel, war on two fronts (Syria and Israel) would significantly reduce the organization's military capabilities (–7)	7
Weighted total	–9.8	20.9	24 (max)	–14.3	

In the second stage, Nasrallah was left with two alternatives. The third alternative—to launch an attack on military targets near the Lebanese–Israeli border—received the highest score overall, in large part because of its contribution to the core dimensions. This alternative would allow Nassrallah to control the intensity and timing of the attacks according to Hezbollah's interests, would strengthen Nasrallah's position within the organization, and would be easier to perform technically than the alternative of attacking targets overseas. However, it carried with it a risk that attacking military targets on the Israeli–Lebanese border would provoke a harsh Israeli response, potentially leading to an escalation that Nasrallah preferred to avoid. Presumably, this is why Nasrallah chose to attack IDF forces near the border, and immediately afterward, in one of his rare public appearances, stated that Hezbollah "[does not] want war with Israel but [does] not fear it" (Perry and Bassam 2015).

Conclusion

Hezbollah's supreme leader, Hassan Nasrallah, is primarily a political animal. Our analyses suggest that, when making decisions, he is driven first and foremost by a desire to minimize political risks. In our examination of a number of Nasrallah's decisions over more than half a decade, we find that he prefers to reject any option that might be politically costly, either to himself or to the organization that he leads. It is only after rejecting unacceptable alternatives that he sorts through the remaining options to find the one that is most beneficial.

One of our key findings is that Nasrallah fears the potential political fallout from retaliation by Hezbollah's enemies. He is generally content to poke and prod at the US or Israel, but afraid of launching attacks that might lead to large-scale escalation. Importantly, this is not because he is wary of the damage that would be caused per se, but rather because the Lebanese public would blame Hezbollah for bringing about this destruction. Thus, the US and Israel can potentially exploit his fears by promising retaliation, but only if they are able to ensure that the public would hold Hezbollah responsible.

1 This list is available at www.fbi.gov/mostwant/terrorists/.
2 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_08_050_2.pdf.
3 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_08_050_2.pdf.
4 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_08_050_2.pdf.
5 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/he/article/18174 (Hebrew).
6 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_10_008_2.pdf.
7 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/article/18202.
8 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20436/E_158_12_1231723028.pdf.
9 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_10_008_2.pdf.
10 "Speech Delivered by Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah 1. During The Solidarity Rally With Egypt That Was Held In Ghobairy Municipality Square – Jnah" (Statement, February 7, 2011).
11 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20521/E_062_13_827044787.pdf.
12 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20436/E_158_12_1231723028.pdf.
13 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/he/article/20436.
14 This decision does not include an alternative concerning intervention by Hezbollah in the conflict in Syria.
15 ITIC, June, 2013:

> On April 18, 2013, the All4Syria website, affiliated with the Syrian opposition reported that 700 armed fighters had been sent to the Al-Qusayr region. On April 14, 2013, the Saudi Arabian website Al-Watan reported that 1,200 Hezbollah fighters had been sent by sea to the Syrian port of Tartus. On May 19, 2013, the Lebanese newspaper Al-Hayat reported that "knowledgeable French sources" said that France had "definite information" that 1,500 Hezbollah fighters were fighting for the Syrian regime. French Foreign Minister Laurent

Fabius said that the French estimated that 3,000–4,000 Hezbollah operatives were involved in the fighting in Syria (Agence France-Presse, May 29, 2013).

16 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/he/article/20521. The Kuwait-based newspaper *Al'Ray* (April 19, 2013) reported that Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, visited Tehran during April 2013. As part of the visit, Nasrallah discussed with Ali Khamenei, Qasem Soleimani (commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards), and other senior Iranian officials the Iranian decision to focus resources on aiding the Syrian regime. According to *Al'Nahar*, "sources close to Hezbollah" have confirmed the visit (April 21, 2013).

17 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/article/20759 and www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20766/E_018_15_579437272.pdf

18 See www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20766/E_018_15_579437272.pdf.

19 See Almanar.com.lb, January 24, 2015.

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5 Uncovering bin Laden's decision rules

Defeating terrorists and ensuring the safety of the US has been made a priority by the current administration. However, combating terrorism requires understanding how and why leaders of terrorist organizations make decisions.

Former CIA al-Qaeda specialist Michael Scheuer (2002, 3) believed that in order to "nullify the threat posed by Osama bin Laden … we, in the West, must first understand the man." According to Rohan Gunaratna (2002, 2), "a comprehensive understanding of al-Qaeda" is required to defeat it. Although Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011, this emphasis on understanding serves to underscore the fact that only with a deeper comprehension of terrorist organizations can the US and its allies in the Global War on Terrorism determine when and where they might next strike, as well as when and where they might be most vulnerable.

This chapter attempts to form a basis for understanding al-Qaeda's decision process during the Osama bin Laden era. Using the Applied Decision Analysis (ADA) method, it examines several cases of decisions made by bin Laden and looks for patterns in the decision-making process. We begin by assessing several of bin Laden's decisions regarding attacks upon the World Trade Center in New York City. We then move to more in-depth analyses of the bombing of the USS *Cole* and the merger with Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Ultimately, the intent of this chapter is to discern an outline that fits with contemporary theories of decision-making and can be used as a foundation from which to conduct tests in future studies.

The al-Qaeda organization

One of the world's most notorious terrorist organizations, al-Qaeda (Arabic for "the base") has its origins in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. During the 1980s, Saudi multimillionaire, Osama bin Laden, along with the Palestinian cleric Abdullah Azzam, began to gather *mujahideen* into a proto-group, initially dedicated to expelling the USSR from Afghanistan. Following the Soviet departure (and Azzam's death) in 1989, bin Laden began formalizing and solidifying al-Qaeda as a religious group, dedicated to a worldwide Islamic revolution (Bodansky 1999; Hegghammer 2008).

The 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, and the subsequent stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia marked an important turning point for al-Qaeda. It was then that the group turned its attention to the US, and adopted the goal of driving all foreign forces from the Arabian Peninsula (Gunaratna 2002). Since then, al-Qaeda has directed most of its efforts against the US, initially acquiring a degree of infamy when al-Qaeda trainee, Ramzi Yousef, attempted to destroy the World Trade Center in 1993. Eight years later, the organization became a household name by succeeding where Yousef had failed.

Over time, al-Qaeda has evolved, growing somewhat more decentralized, especially in the face of military defeats since the American declaration of a Global War on Terrorism in 2001 (Borum and Gelles 2005; Jackson 2006). The group was led by bin Laden from its founding through May of 2011 (this fully encompasses the period analyzed below), when he was killed in Pakistan by a team of Navy SEALs. Since then, control has passed to bin Laden's deputy, the Egyptian cleric and former head of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Although al-Qaeda continues to operate throughout the world, a series of major setbacks (including the killing of its founder and operational head) has left it severely weakened and far less effective.

Constructing bin Laden's decision matrix

The first stage in the utilization of ADA is to identify the decision matrix employed by a decision-maker. In each specific instance, the alternatives will change, but the dimensions and their relative weights should remain reasonably stable. Thus, it is necessary first to construct the relevant dimensions and assign their weights before moving to unique instances.

In understanding the decision-making characteristics of the al-Qaeda organization, we treat it as a personalist autocracy, focusing on Osama bin Laden and his decision matrix. A personalist autocracy is one in which a single leader dominates an organization or state, and is generally viewed as the appropriate choice for leadership by his subjects, often because of his charisma or ideological affinity (Kinne 2005).

There is no doubt that Osama bin Laden was the premier actor in al-Qaeda. According to testimony from an early al-Qaeda defector, upon joining the group, a member must swear allegiance to bin Laden as *emir* (Corbin 2002; Burke 2003). The organization is divided into four committees which operate with a good deal of autonomy, but which are ultimately under the control of a consultative council, which itself was run and dominated by bin Laden, who served as the backbone of the organization (Corbin 2002; Gunaratna 2002). Attributing the structure to bin Laden's business management education, Post (2007, 202) likens al-Qaeda to "a holding company," and bin Laden to the "chairman of the board." As the chief executive of the organization, his role as primary actor in major organizational decisions seems relatively apparent—he acted as we might expect the founder and chairman of the board of any corporation to act (see Burke 2003; Gunaratna 2002). What is less apparent is bin Laden's role in operational decisions. The view of terrorist groups as collections of autonomous cells who operate without the input, acknowledgment or more than the barest of assistance from the leadership argues against bin Laden's involvement in decisions concerning attacks executed during his term. However, the evidence seems to indicate that he was indeed involved in such decisions, and that one is justified in saying that al-Qaeda was a personalist autocracy under bin Laden in both the organizational and operational senses.[1]

While it is likely that bin Laden rarely, if ever, participated in the actual selection of targets, it is clear that he acted as a top bureaucratic manager. Target selection was carried out by subordinates or outsiders, who then presented their plans to bin Laden and his advisers. His role was then to choose whether to approve or reject the proposal, with the latter being selected overwhelmingly (DeYoung and Dobbs 2001; Gunaratna 2002; Burke 2003). Although the target selection was made by outside sources, the timing was selected by al-Qaeda leadership and "complete control [was] maintained over the operation's management" at all times by bin Laden and

those in the upper echelons of the organization (Schweitzer and Shay 2003, 130). This is corroborated by the testimony of the so-called "20th hijacker," Zacarias Moussaoui, who claimed that bin Laden personally approved the September 11 attacks on the US, validating a theory "widely held by anti-terrorism experts" (Serrano 2005, 1A).

In light of this evidence, it seems reasonable to assume that the decision matrix representing al-Qaeda during the era in which Osama bin Laden served as head of the organization would be that of bin Laden himself, for operational as well as organizational decisions. As such, it is important to identify the specific goals that bin Laden set for himself, as well as for al-Qaeda. By understanding bin Laden and his objectives, one can distill out the criteria that were most pertinent in his decision calculus.

Osama bin Laden

Osama bin Laden was born in March 1957 to billionaire Saudi construction magnate, Mohammed bin Laden. Although he received a strict Wahhabi upbringing, bin Laden's militancy did not emerge until he met the radical Palestinian cleric, Abdullah Azzam, in Saudi Arabia in 1980. Azzam served as a mentor to bin Laden, inspiring and further indoctrinating him into radical Salafism (Robinson 2002). When Azzam traveled to Afghanistan to help the *mujahideen* fighting the Soviets, bin Laden joined him (Bodansky 1999). It was in Afghanistan that bin Laden rose to a position of leadership among the anti-Soviet fighters and began laying the groundwork for an organization dedicated to worldwide Jihad.

By 1989, bin Laden and Azzam began to drift apart, with bin Laden favoring the use of terrorism in prosecuting the global war, and Azzam favoring a more conventional and localized approach (Hegghammer 2008). Shortly before Azzam's assassination in November, the two split, with bin Laden forming the group that would become al-Qaeda. The following year, Iraq invaded Kuwait, taking the kingdom's oil fields, and threatening neighboring Saudi Arabia. Although bin Laden offered to aid in the defense of his homeland, the Saudi rulers chose instead to invite American and Coalition forces to defend them against the Iraqis. In bin Laden's eyes, this development painted the Saudi royalty as corrupt and faithless, and the Western forces as invaders. In response, he adjusted his goals to include the downfall of the House of Saud, and the expulsion of the Americans from the region (Bodansky 1999).

Throughout the 1990s, bin Laden pursued his goals of worldwide Jihad, and the destruction of the US and the Saudi royal family. This culminated in his greatest success, when al-Qaeda destroyed the World Trade Center in 2001. Subsequently, he was forced into hiding, as the US expelled the ruling Taliban from Afghanistan and sought the al-Qaeda leadership. Bin Laden fled to Pakistan, but continued to direct al-Qaeda operations and to play a role in planning even while on the run. His command of the organization was finally brought to a close when US Navy SEALs found and killed him in Abbottabad, Pakistan in May of 2011.

Understanding bin Laden's background is helpful in placing his goals into context. We turn now to a discussion of the relevant dimensions that he considered when making organizational and operational decisions.

The personal–political dimension

Bin Laden's ultimate goals included the expulsion of Americans and non-Muslims from the Middle East (and Saudi Arabia in particular), the overthrow of the secular and decadent Arab governments (ICT 2005)—whom he believed to be allied with the US (Scheuer 2002)—and ultimately the re-establishment of the caliphate, ostensibly controlled by bin Laden (Gunaratna 2002; Schweitzer and Shay 2003). Pursuing these goals required him to remain the leader of al-Qaeda. For this reason, as with many leaders, political concerns were paramount.

Through his actions, bin Laden has indeed shown a propensity to concern himself with his personal status. He has been described as an adept manipulator of media and propaganda, who is "careful to tailor his statements carefully for the selected audience," using "selective Qur'anic references" and playing upon the particular feelings of those at whom his statement is directed (Burke 2003, 158). When his mentor, Abdullah Azzam died, bin Laden "chose selectively" among Azzam's writings and words "to lend credence to his narrow political vision" (Gunaratna 2002, 86). Furthermore, there is evidence that he plotted against Azzam, in order to gain political status and "reconfigure … the nascent Al Qaeda in his own image" (ibid., 23). Finally, he has no qualms about denying fairly obvious facts. Despite the fact that the CIA funding of *mujahideen* during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is well-documented common knowledge, bin Laden as a "self-styled champion of Islam" understood that he "[could not] afford … to be seen as owing anything to America" (Corbin 2002, 24). Thus, to

increase his status and serve his political goals, he described the CIA as a burden, and claimed that the funding came not from the US, but from the Arab states.

Because of its inherent primacy among bin Laden's goals (i.e., because his other goals could not be accomplished without it), the political dimension shall be assigned the greatest weight. In non-compensatory situations, we should expect alternatives that score negatively on this dimension—that is, alternatives that overtly and credibly threatened bin Laden's leadership of al-Qaeda—to be eliminated immediately. In other situations, this dimension should function in the same way as the other dimensions and should only impart an influence upon the outcome in proportion to its relatively larger weight.

It should be further noted that the political dimension can be broken down into bin Laden's standing with the mass public, and bin Laden's standing within his organization. Thus, there is an organizational political dimension and a mass political dimension. These remain the most important of dimensions. The former signifies the amount of power that bin Laden held within al-Qaeda. During his life, he controlled the organization as if it were a major corporation (see, for example, Gunaratna 2002; Burke 2003). His lieutenants (e.g., Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Zubaydah or (prior to his death) Abu Musab al-Zarqawi) served as executives and upper management. By maintaining organizational control—which can be a difficult feat—bin Laden was able to delegate and to direct the organization toward his objectives. If bin Laden's organizational authority had collapsed, then so would his leadership and any potential to realize his goals. This is most apparent when we consider the possibility that bin Laden could be replaced by an associate who preferred a more local (rather than global) scale of attack (see the decision to merge with Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) later in this chapter). Within the organization, his personal honor (i.e., perceived integrity, dedication to the cause, masculinity) was highly important. The organizational political dimension was the slightly more important of the two political dimensions because it directly affected bin Laden's leadership, whereas the mass public dimension had only an indirect effect. That this dimension was of paramount importance to bin Laden is substantiated by Smith's (2008) finding that al-Qaeda—in its interviews, statements and writings—tends to stress ingroup affiliation imagery to a significant extent. This indicates the concern that the organization has for maintaining strong cohesion.

The mass public–political dimension signifies the amount of support that bin Laden had from the public as a whole. If this dropped, it would become more difficult to raise money or recruit new terrorists; additionally, bin Laden's own status would suffer if he was not seen as representing the feelings of the people. To the mass public, it was not bin Laden's personal honor that was important, but the reasoning behind his actions and whether he followed through on what he said (Burke 2003). Around the world, many Muslims supported him not because they condone terrorism but because they were "pleased … that bin Laden [was] taking a stand and [felt] a profound … identification with his cause" (Burke 2003, 35). As long as they supported him, there is some legitimacy to his rule within the terrorist world.

The religious dimension

Al-Qaeda is first and foremost a religious organization, with more religious motivation than any of the previous major terrorist groups (Scheuer 2002). Its ultimate goal is to be at the vanguard of an Islamic revolution that re-establishes the old caliphate (Gunaratna 2002; Burke 2003; Schweitzer and Shay 2003). The caliphate is meant to be an "Islamic utopia," for which the Taliban's Afghanistan was the model (AbuKhalil 2002, 75). Bin Laden himself frequently (and, selectively) cited religious texts in defining the goals and strategies of al-Qaeda, directing his words toward the Islamic world (Gunaratna 2002; Schweitzer and Shay 2003).

The religious dimension was critically important to bin Laden because, despite his intensely religious focus and the fact that he couches goals and tactics in religious terms, he had no formal religious training and no clerical authority (Gunaratna 2002; Burke 2003; Schweitzer and Shay 2003). Because he had intensely studied and taught himself Islamic law, bin Laden could and frequently did issue *fatwas* (Burke 2003). However, clerics with formal religious authority could potentially overturn these decrees, and thus bin Laden was forced to gain and maintain the support of "known, radical Islamic religious clerics who adopted his ideology" in order to give greater influence to his decrees (Schweitzer and Shay 2003, 24).

The religiously oriented goals of al-Qaeda combined with the importance of maintaining good relations with radical clerics suggest that the religious dimension was one of great importance to bin Laden. Indeed, it should have a weight just below that of his personal–political dimension. It is not the most important because bin Laden could still seek his goals without the

support and influence that he has in the religious community. His own knowledge and slight authority on religious matters, along with his ability to couch his goals in nationalistic terms if necessary (see AbuKhalil 2002), would mean that a loss of support in the radical Muslim world make his work more difficult, but not impossible. Nonetheless, it is clear that gaining and maintaining support among Muslims—especially among Muslim leaders—was highly important and incredibly helpful to bin Laden in seeking his goals.

The strategic dimension

In Osama bin Laden's mind, "defeating the United States" was his chief "strategic goal" (Scheuer 2002, 55). While bin Laden ultimately wanted to establish an Islamic utopia, his most important immediate goal was the defeat of the US. In the *fatwas* and declarations of war that he issued—as well as in interviews he gave—he repeatedly called upon "good" Muslims to direct their fighting against the US, and declared every American citizen to be an enemy combatant (AbuKhalil 2002; Gunaratna 2002; Piszkiewicz 2003; Schweitzer and Shay 2003; ICT 2005).

Based on bin Laden's worldview, defeating the US was a necessary step on the path to achieving his ultimate goals. According to Picucci (2008), bin Laden and the other al-Qaeda leaders tend to view the world as conflictual in nature, believing that political change is impossible without open conflict. This is especially true vis-à-vis the US. His primary concern with the US was its effect upon Muslim countries and the Islamic world in general (AbuKhalil 2002; Gunaratna 2002; Burke 2003). The US' presence in what was to bin Laden a holy area (Saudi Arabia) alone was intolerable (AbuKhalil 2002), but he also believed America to be propping up regimes hostile to the idea of an Islamist society.

In striking out at American targets, bin Laden hoped to convince the US to leave the Middle East and to end all support for Israel (Piszkiewicz 2003). This fit into bin Laden's short-term plan, and in his mind, may have been the only means of achieving these goals (Picucci 2008). However, in the long run, he hoped not only to eliminate the influence of the US, but to destroy it and its allies altogether (Gunaratna 2002).

Alternatives that caused damage to the US or shifted the strategic balance in the direction of bin Laden and al-Qaeda would be helpful in these endeavors, and should be rated highly along the strategic dimension.

Because this dimension represents the main portion of bin Laden's goals, but not all of them, its weight should be below those of the political and religious dimensions, but still weighted relatively heavily.

The military dimension

Any armed struggle requires soldiers to fight against the enemy. The military dimension represents an alternative's implications with regard to al-Qaeda's ability to fight against the US and its allies. The measure is fairly straightforward: positive implications would increase the number or the abilities of al-Qaeda's recruits or the amount and power of its weapons; negative implications would lessen the number or abilities of recruits or potential to receive weapons. It should be noted, however, that this is not a direct calculation of the likelihood of tactical success. The likelihood of tactical success is important only insofar as it affects the future military capabilities of the organization.

Bin Laden certainly showed concern over recruiting, making a "special appeal to Muslim youths" to join his Jihad (Scheuer 2002, 58). From al-Qaeda's beginnings, it has been relatively short on manpower and has needed to focus largely on recruiting new young men (Gunaratna 2002; Crenshaw 2009). Bin Laden clearly recognized the need to maintain sufficient numbers of fighters, and would not have been so profligate as to send his men to their death without purpose. However, his use of suicide tactics (most obviously in the September 11 attacks that also killed 19 members of al-Qaeda) demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice warriors to achieve his goals.

Bin Laden also attempted to acquire biological, chemical and nuclear weapons (Gurantana 2002; Schweitzer and Shay 2003), saying of them in 1999, "it would be a sin for Muslims not to try and possess weapons that would prevent the infidel front inflicting harm on Muslims" (Burke 2003, 187). In 2003, an associate of bin Laden and one Saudi Arabia's senior clerics, Sheikh Nasser bin Hamd al-Fahad, issued a *fatwa* that proclaimed the use of weapons of mass destruction against the US and Britain to be legitimate (Fighel and Marzouk 2003). While acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction was a high priority for bin Laden, it is interesting—though expected, based on the weighting of dimensions—that he sought religious legitimacy for their use.

The acquisition of weapons and manpower was an important part of the pursuit of bin Laden's goals. It is likely that he tried to seek both as often as possible, so long as the search did not interfere with other goals. It is improbable, for example, that he would have chosen to sacrifice a member of al-Qaeda in an attack unless it was clear that such a sacrifice would increase the damage done by the attack or in some other way bring the group closer to its goal. In such a case, the slight decrease in military might from a suicide attack may have lead to the alternative being rejected. On the other hand, it is unlikely that he would have chosen to acquire weapons that were not sanctioned in some form by a religious authority (although this would probably not have been a concern since bin Laden had several leading clerics, such as al-Fahad in his pocket). Thus, the military criterion is a relevant one; however, it is substantially less weighty than the other three.

Table 5.1 depicts bin Laden's generic decision matrix. The dimensions are each present, with their respective weights assigned, demonstrating their relative importance. A sensitivity analysis of the weights of the dimensions can shed light on the effect of different weights on bin Laden's past choices. To begin an analysis, one would simply plug the relevant alternatives into the three columns (there can, of course, be fewer or additional alternatives), and the information regarding the implications of the alternatives, as well as their respective ratings, into the cells. Once the information is entered, the process of ADA can begin as described above, in order to seek out a pattern in decision-making.

Analyzing bin Laden's decisions

The decision to bomb the World Trade Center in 1993

The attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, carried out by Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, is sometimes attributed to other groups (or said that Yousef acted under no one's aegis). However, it is clear that Yousef did receive aid from al-Qaeda, and that bin Laden did approve of the action. It is "indisputable … that this terrorist had links to Osama bin Laden's network, stayed in al-Qaeda guesthouses and received training in their training camps" (Corbin 2002, 45). He was also "praised publicly" by bin Laden, who "in private conceded [Yousef] was al-Qaeda's best operative" (Gunaratna 2002, 177). Even disregarding bin Laden's personal affirmation of Yousef's al-Qaeda

membership, the fact that he made extensive use of al-Qaeda's resources indicates that there must have been some organizational approval of his mission. Thus, prior to the attack, bin Laden faced a choice of whether or not to approve al-Qaeda assistance for Yousef's attack.

Table 5.1 Bin Laden's general decision matrix

	Alternative 1	*Alternative 2*	*Alternative 3*	*Weight*
Organizational–Political				10
Mass Political				9
Religious				8
Strategic				7
Military				4

The implications of this decision were fairly clear: by assisting Yousef, bin Laden had very little to lose and much to gain. In 1993, al-Qaeda was not well known, and even the agencies responsible for US counterterrorism had not yet focused on the organization (Corbin 2002). By associating himself with a large-scale attack, bin Laden could (and did) change that. Despite the failure of the attack, bin Laden continued the attempt at striking big targets—and continued to employ Yousef to do so, incidentally—organizing assassination attempts on Pope John Paul II, President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (Piszkiewicz 2003). This "provides insights into the al-Qaeda mindset" (Gunaratna 2002, 177) because it demonstrates the importance bin Laden placed on becoming well known among the masses. In order to increase political power, he was willing to provide resources to back risky plans that often had little or no chance of success.

As illustrated in Table 5.2, the decision in this case seems to be relatively straightforward. The vast superiority of the decision to render assistance makes it difficult to discern what decision characteristics operated here. However, it seems fairly clear, based upon his later activities, that bin Laden was concerned with achieving recognition among the masses, and therefore the decision was sensitive to scores on the mass political dimension. It is not clear whether the decision was holistic or non-holistic. Because of his emphasis on gaining some measure of notoriety, it is likely that the search

was dimension-based, non-compensatory and order-sensitive in the dimensions. This and subsequent decisions are indicative of a maximizing strategy. While smaller attacks (e.g., bombing restaurants or nightclubs) would have been beneficial, the fact that bin Laden chose to pursue big and symbolically significant targets seems to show that he was interested in maximizing his gains from any one attack.

The decision to strike the US on September 11, 2001

The attack that made al-Qaeda famous was its strike against the US in New York and Washington, DC on September 11, 2001. As with most attacks, the targets were selected by other members of the al-Qaeda network. Evidence indicates that bin Laden had called for attacks in the US, and was familiar with the broad idea of the attack, but not the operational details (Burke 2003). He did, however, sign off on the attack and provide funding for it (Serrano 2005). Bin Laden was faced with the decision of approving the suggested attack, choosing a different target or rejecting the idea of an attack against the US altogether. To bin Laden, any attack within the US would have been highly beneficial, while not attacking would be detrimental and therefore unacceptable. Based on previous responses to al-Qaeda's terrorism, including "ineffective missile attacks" and failures to make good on threats of retaliation (Corbin 2002, 95), as well as the Clinton administration's expressed desire to "give Osama bin Laden a fair trial" (Piszkiewicz 2003, 117), it is unlikely that he expected the US to react in the way that it did, or even to have the capability to enact such a forceful reply. This is further reinforced by Picucci's (2008) claim that al-Qaeda leaders tend to view their opponents (e.g., the US) as highly predictable, with a severely limited response set. Had he anticipated the actual response, and the threat posed to his personal safety, it is possible his decision calculus might have been altered. Indeed, it is likely that the September 11 attacks were, *ex post*, seen as too devastating by bin Laden and his ilk, and that such attacks will not be carried out in the future (Gaddis 2002). This is not entirely clear, however, as the "social isolation" and strong "collective identity" of al-Qaeda causes the organization to tend toward actions that are riskier even than other terrorist groups (Picucci 2008, 209). Regardless of how bin Laden would have acted under complete information, it is clear that with the information under which he operated, approval of the attack was the superior alternative.

Table 5.2 Bin Laden's decision to assist in the 1993 World Trade Center attack

	Approve the attack by rendering assistance to Yousef	*Reject the idea by denying Yousef assistance*	*Weight*
Organizational–Political	If al-Qaeda's resources significantly aided in a successful attack on US soil, it would be one of the first major signs of bin Laden's proficiency as a leader. Rating: 5	Denying the use of al-Qaeda facilities if Yousef was an outsider, or of funding and approval if he was a member, would have no effect upon bin Laden's organizational status. Rating: 0	10
Mass Political	If the attack was successful, the involvement of al-Qaeda would likely become well known. As there had not been a successful attack of this magnitude on American soil, al-Qaeda's popularity and prominence would increase dramatically. Rating: 7	There would likely be no effect upon bin Laden or al-Qaeda's standing—whether or not the attack was successful—if they refused aid to Yousef. Rating: 0	9
Religious	Regardless of the success or failure of the attack, bin Laden would likely be praised within the radical Islamic world for targeting the "Great Satan." Rating: 7	Denying a fellow holy warrior aid, especially in fighting against the US, would not play well among radical Muslims. Rating: –3	8
Strategic	A successful attack would cause tremendous damage to the US, both physically and symbolically. Rating: 8	Not attacking the US would have no effect on the strategic dimension. Rating: 0	7
Military	If the US were to find out that bin Laden assisted Yousef, there is the possibility that they would use force against him. However, by aiding Yousef, bin Laden sends a message to potential recruits that they are welcome to use al-Qaeda's facilities in the struggle against the US, and in the event of a successful attack, the increased prominence of al-Qaeda would likely lead to additional recruits. Rating: 7	There would be little effect upon the military dimension from a decision not to assist. There is, however, the possibility, that al-Qaeda would seem unwelcoming to some potential recruits or holy warriors, if they were to deny assistance to someone of sympathetic views. Rating: –2	4
Weighted total	25.3 (max)	–3.2	

Based on the "corporate" model of attack approval in al-Qaeda, in which multiple "projects" are presented and only a few are approved (see Gunaratna 2002; DeYoung and Dobbs 2001), it is likely that all of these options were considered, and that bin Laden engaged in a holistic decision process. Also, based upon this model, bin Laden would have used an

alternative-based search, examining each of the possible attacks in turn (with all other proposed attacks being subsumed by the second alternative). Despite the half-million dollar price tag on the September 11 attacks (Burke 2003), it is not likely that any type of economic consideration was important. Al-Qaeda is well known for having deep pockets (Shahar 2001; Scheuer 2002; Burke 2003), and thus the ability to fund multiple projects at once. Thus it is unlikely that his search was order-sensitive.

There is some ambiguity as to whether his decision was maximizing or satisficing (without knowledge of what other types of attacks were presented), though it is likely that he employed something of a maximizing strategy, choosing the alternative with the highest score. However, had he acted as a true utility maximizer, we likely would have seen an attempt to minimize Muslim casualties in the attacks (once the selection was made), especially considering that only a few years earlier, he "had been facing a mutiny within al-Qaeda's ranks" for "ordering the massacre of over two hundred Africans, many of them Muslims" (Corbin 2002, 87). The potential discontent over the death of Muslim civilians in the September 11 attack could be expected to be nearly totally mitigated, however, by the joy (among organization members) over such a huge success. In addition, the positive organizational implications of conducting a successful attack of such magnitude, especially in light of the 1993 failure, may have offset the negative implications of Muslim casualties in the religious dimension. Thus, the religious dimension was compensatory.

However, cognizant of his recent history, a decision-maker pursuing a maximizing strategy would have attempted to minimize Muslim casualties and maximize utility on the religious and organizational dimensions. His decision is summarized in Table 5.3.

Claiming responsibility for 9/11

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, there was no claim of responsibility from any group. There was, however, much conjecture over who was responsible, primarily focusing on al-Qaeda (e.g., Bush 2001; Karmon 2001; Rubin 2001).

Nevertheless, al-Qaeda did not claim responsibility for the attacks (indeed, bin Laden originally denied responsibility) until nearly a month later, after the US and the British government had released a wealth of evidence implicating al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda has a long-standing policy of not claiming responsibility for attacks (Schweitzer 2001; Gunaratna 2002). The purpose of the policy was to insulate not only bin Laden, but also his state sponsors from potential retaliatory measures (Schweitzer 2001). Thus bin Laden was not expected by his colleagues or supporters to claim responsibility. Furthermore, as Picucci (2008) notes, the period immediately following the 9/11 attacks was a time when al-Qaeda appeared to place an unusually high value on verbal cooperation. Thus, choosing not to claim responsibility immediately after the attack carried with it no disadvantages, and there was no reason to deviate from established policy.

It is likely that bin Laden chose not to claim responsibility precisely because there were no disadvantages associated with it, despite the fact that claiming responsibility (based on the information he had at the time) would provide greater expected utility. The decision—summarized in Table 5.4—was non-holistic because the claiming responsibility alternative was not seriously considered. It was alternative-based, order-sensitive and satisficing. Because not claiming responsibility was "good enough," there was no reason to consider claiming responsibility, and the decision stopped after one alternative. There is no way to know whether the decision was compensatory or non-compensatory at this stage, however.

As the month went on, the US continued to mention al-Qaeda as the likely culprit in formal settings (e.g., Bush 2001). Finally, on October 4, the British government released all of its evidence implicating bin Laden and al-Qaeda in the attacks.[2] At this point, even if it was not apparent to some that bin Laden was behind the attacks, it *was* clear that the US was going to take military action against him (Corbin 2002). This change in US policy, along with the destruction of any pretense of deniability for the Taliban regime, prompted bin Laden to respond once more, and decide whether or not to claim responsibility.

Table 5.3 Bin Laden’s decision to approve the 9/11 attacks

	Approve the attack	*Approve an attack, but on a different target*	*Reject the idea of an attack altogether*	*Weight*
Organizational–Political	Bin Laden would show himself to be an incredibly effective leader, increasing his status and making him seem all the more important to the cause. Additionally, it would be a success in comparison to the failed 1993 bombing. However, the potential deaths of several Muslim civilians might lessen the benefits. Rating: 6	Successfully carrying out an attack against any target in the US would cause bin Laden's organizational status to rise, though likely less than as a result of the September 11 attack. Rating: 5	Having called for attacks within the US, retreating from the position would make bin Laden seem like an ineffective leader. Rating: –6	10
Mass Political	Bin Laden would instantly be idolized among anti-Americanists throughout the world. Rating: 10	Any attack against the US would increase bin Laden's standing with the anti-American mass public, though substantially less than the September 11 attack Rating: 6	Having called for attacks within the US, this would make bin Laden seem to be either afraid of the US or dishonest. Rating: –4	9
Religious	Large-scale attacks against the US play well in the radical Islamic world, but this attack has the potential to kill Muslims and not only Jews and Christians. Rating: 5	Although the attack would be of a smaller scale, bin Laden could minimize Muslim casualties. Rating: 7	Choosing not to carry out an attack would make bin Laden seem weak in the eyes of radical Islam. Rating: –6	8
Strategic	The economic, physical and psychological damage to the US would be massive, even by al-Qaeda's more conservative estimates of the outcome. Rating: 10	Although a smaller-scale attack would likely cause less damage, it would maintain the paramount psychological effects of an attack on US soil. Rating: 7	Not attacking the US would leave the strategic situation unchanged. Rating: 0	7
Military	Because bin Laden had little reason to believe the US would retaliate seriously, the estimated military costs beyond the deaths of the hijackers were relatively small. Rating: –4	This would likely result in even less expected retaliation and fewer than 19 deaths would be required to carry out the attack. Rating: –1	This option would not result in any deaths, nor would it provide any reason for retaliation by the US. Rating: 0	4
Weighted total	24.4 (max)	20.5	–14.4	

Table 5.4 Bin Laden's decision not to claim responsibility for 9/11

	Claim responsibility for the attacks	*Do not claim responsibility for the attacks*	*Weight*
Organizational–Political	This would break with al-Qaeda policy, and because it would be known within the organization that bin Laden was responsible, this would have no beneficial effect on his status. Rating: –1	It was al-Qaeda's organizational policy not to claim responsibility. This option would maintain the status quo. Rating: 0	10
Mass Political	Because it was not known without a doubt outside of al-Qaeda that the organization was responsible, admitting to the attack would greatly increase bin Laden's status with the mass public, who opposed the US. Rating: 7	There was much speculation that bin Laden was responsible, and it was well known that al-Qaeda did not claim responsibility for attacks. Bin Laden's status would still climb with the mass public, but slightly less than if he assuaged their doubts. Rating: 5	9
Religious	Claiming responsibility would solidify for bin Laden a greater standing in the radical Islamic world. Rating: 7	Once again, it was fairly widely acknowledged that al-Qaeda was behind the attacks. Following policy would not harm bin Laden. Rating: 5	8
Strategic	The damage had already been done to the US. Bin Laden's claim of responsibility would do nothing more than let them be sure who attacked. Rating: 0	The US was fairly certain that al-Qaeda was responsible, and claiming responsibility would have had little effect on the strategic situation at this point. Rating: 0	7
Military	With the US seeming to be ready to use a more forceful option, letting them know for sure who attacked them might create a great military danger for bin Laden. Rating: –6	Though the US was fairly certain al-Qaeda was responsible, not claiming responsibility might allow the blame to be shifted, or at least might allow al-Qaeda some time to prepare for war. Rating: –2	4
Weighted total	8.5 (max)	7.7	

Bin Laden's new choice came in October of 2001, shortly after the evidence of al-Qaeda's responsibility for the September 11 attacks had been made public. Since the primary purpose of not claiming responsibility was to protect the state sponsor (Schweitzer 2001), and since the US was threatening to pursue the Taliban anyway, bin Laden could not continue to

deny responsibility without appearing weak and cowardly in the eyes of the mass public.

In light of the new information from the US, bin Laden's decision matrix, which is summarized in Table 5.5, changed. Not claiming responsibility was no longer "good enough" for him. Rather, it would adversely affect his personal honor and the public's assessment of him. And so, October 7, 3 days after the release of the evidence implicating him, bin Laden not only admitted to the attack, but also used harsh rhetoric, praising the attack and "vowing the United States would never enjoy security till infidel armies leave the Gulf" (Gunaratna 2002, 111).

The greatest effect of the change in events was along bin Laden's political dimension. Based upon his reaction, this seems to be what most concerned him. While it is not possible to be certain, it is unlikely that he used a holistic decision rule. It is more probable that he noticed the new implications along the political dimension and decided to claim responsibility. This would make it a dimension-based, non-compensatory search, which was order-sensitive among the dimensions. What is most interesting is whether it was a satisficing or maximizing rule. While the previous decision had been selected because of its satisficing properties, and it is possible that its new incarnation was rejected for similar reasons, bin Laden clearly attempted to maximize benefits and minimize costs *on the alternative that he selected* by using such harsh language. This would serve not only to stem any status loss but also to further increase it. Thus, in the second manifestation of the decision, bin Laden seems to have eliminated his original option (not claiming credit) and used a maximizing strategy to procure optimal effects from the new alternative.

The decision to attack the USS Cole

On October 12, 2000, two men onboard a small harbor boat made friendly gestures to the crew of the US Navy destroyer *Cole* and steered their vessel alongside it. Among several small harbor boats assisting the warship at a refueling station in the Yemeni port of Aden, the two men drew close to the *Cole* and detonated a large quantity of explosives aboard their vessel. The blast tore a gaping hole in the ship's side, killed 17 members of the ship's crew and wounded 39 others. The two men onboard the explosives-laden harbor boat also died in the attack. The suicide attack appeared to US policy-makers to be an adaptation of the truck-bomb tactic used by terrorist

organizations in previous attacks (Perl and O'Rourke 2001). But the "boat-bomb's" ability to strike a heavily armed US destroyer fomented a re-evaluation of US military force protection measures at sea (Newberry 2001).

Table 5.5 Bin Laden's decision to claim responsibility for 9/11

	Claim responsibility for the attacks	*Do not claim responsibility for the attacks*	*Weight*
Organizational–Political	By breaking with organizational policy, bin Laden could demonstrate that he was willing to stand up to the US even in the face of grave danger. Rating: 5	Because the reason for anonymity was no longer valid, refusing to take credit for the attack might have the intra-organizational effect of making bin Laden seem afraid of the US, and a less desirable leader. Rating: –5	10
Mass Political	By claiming credit, this not only assures the mass public that bin Laden was responsible, but it also shows them that he is not afraid to stand up to the US, even with the threat of high powered military force. Rating: 8	Those convinced by the evidence would see bin Laden as a coward for continuing to refuse responsibility even when it was well known that he was behind the attack. Rating: –7	9
Religious	Like the previous option, this would only solidify al-Qaeda's support within the radical Islamic world, though its effect would be slightly less potent now. Rating: 2	There would be no change in the organization's standing with the religious community if they did not claim responsibility, as it would simply maintain the pre-attack status quo. Rating: 0	8
Strategic	This sends a message to the Americans that, in spite of their military threats and capabilities, bin Laden is not afraid to go to war. Rating: 5	Refusing to claim responsibility would have little effect on the strategic dimension for bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Rating: 0	7
Military	A claim of responsibility would be an official declaration of war from bin Laden, and would likely lead to many deaths. Rating: –5	There is the possibility—though incredibly small—that bin Laden's refusal to claim responsibility might lessen the military costs of the American attack. Rating: –4	4
Weighted total	15.3 (max)	–12.9	

Immediately following the attack, US policy-makers correctly surmised that the bombing had been a carefully planned act of terrorism (Burns and Myers 2000). But no one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. In fact, the blast that crippled the *Cole* was the result of a year's worth of

planning by al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen and supervised directly by Osama bin Laden. The al-Qaeda leader was deeply involved in the terrorist operation. From the selection of the location and type of target to the provision of financial resources for purchasing the explosives used in the attack, bin Laden was the ultimate overseer of the strike in Yemen (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004).

As we point out above, al-Qaeda's long-term goals include the expulsion of Americans and non-Muslims from the Middle East (and Saudi Arabia in particular), the overthrow of the secular and decadent Arab governments (ICT 2005)—whom bin Laden believed to be allied with the US (Scheuer 2002)—and ultimately the re-establishment of the caliphate, ostensibly controlled by bin Laden (Gunaratna 2002; Schweitzer and Shay 2003). How did the attack on the *Cole* serve these goals? The immediate aims of the attack on the Cole appear to include revenge against the US, bolstering al-Qaeda's recruitment efforts and enhancing the image of the terror organization as the preeminent Jihadist movement.

First, bin Laden sought revenge for the 1998 strikes against his home and training camps in Afghanistan (e.g., Gunaratna 2002). Although bin Laden's lieutenant in Yemen preferred to focus the bombing effort on a commercial vessel, bin Laden ordered that a US warship be targeted by the operation. An initial attempt to hit a US Navy vessel, the USS *The Sullivans*, failed in January 2000 when the "boat-bomb" proved to be too heavy and sank before it reached its target (Gunaratna 2002; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004). Like the *Cole*, *The Sullivans* is an Aegis-equipped, Arleigh Burke-class destroyer—the same class of ship used in the 1998 cruise missile strikes against al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan (Gunaratna 2002, 140). Thus, striking back at an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer from which cruise missiles had been launched at bin Laden was an act of revenge.

The second aim of the attack was to bolster al-Qaeda's recruitment efforts. Bin Laden intended to use an attack on a US warship as a recruitment tool (Corbin 2002; Gunaratna 2002; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004). A member of the terrorist team in Yemen was assigned the role of documenting the attack on videotape from an apartment window overlooking the harbor. However, the operation was carried out before this individual reached his station (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004). Undaunted, bin Laden instructed his media committee to film a re-enactment of the

attack on the *Cole* and disseminated the material—along with footage of terrorist training camps and the plight of Muslims around the world—to news outlets as well as pools of potential recruits in Saudi Arabia and Yemen (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004). Flaunting al-Qaeda's ability to humble the most powerful military in the world spurred an increase in recruitment (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004)—perhaps because the attack on the *Cole* led growing numbers of disaffected Muslims to believe that it was possible to strike back at the US.

The third immediate aim of the attack was to establish the preeminence of bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization among a growing number of Islamic extremist movements (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004). Although al-Qaeda participated in attacks against US troops in Aden and Somalia in 1992–1993, had links to the Manila air plot of 1994–1995 and carried out bombings of the US embassies in East Africa in 1998, bin Laden's organization continued to compete for resources and sympathies with other terror organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas. According to intelligence reports, following the attack on the *Cole* (see National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004, 191), bin Laden sought to provoke the US into a visible armed confrontation —perhaps to raise the global profile of al-Qaeda. But this goal was not fully realized until September of the following year.

Al-Qaeda's deployment of a "boat-bomb" in October 2000 not only highlighted the apparent vulnerabilities of the US military in-transit; the attack on the USS *Cole* also provides important insights into the command and control structure of the organization as well as the decision processes of its leader, Osama bin Laden. Before the *Cole* bombing, suicide attacks against military targets were typically the hallmark of desperation. For example, *kamikaze* pilots of World War II began sacrificing themselves only after the Japanese cause became desperate (see e.g., Berman and Laitin n.d.; Rosenthal n.d.). Similarly, suicide attacks have been carried out most prominently in Israel, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Turkey by groups who hold the objectives of an insurgency, but lack sufficient resources to conduct full military-style operations (see e.g., Pape 2003). In light of bin Laden's extensive resources and consequent range of potential terrorist operations, why did the terror mastermind choose to deploy another boat-bomb against US military personnel?

In the wake of the failed attack on *The Sullivans*, bin Laden was left with numerous options. He could continue the plan, by approving an operation highly similar to the failed attack. This option would involve targeting another Arleigh Burke-class US warship in the same area (i.e., off the coast of Yemen). Alternatively, he could modify the plan by approving an attack with a slightly different focus. Finally, in light of the recent failed attack, he could choose to abort the plan, and reject any plans for further attacks. Choosing to continue the plan would involve staging another attack in Yemen against a US warship. Bin Laden's original instructions to the al-Qaeda team in Yemen had been to seek out a warship and destroy it (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004), specifically an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer (Gunaratna 2002). Continuing the plan would involve a retooling in order to increase the chances of success, but the general target would remain the same.

While a specific type of US warship made the missile strikes, bin Laden might still seek revenge against the US military by attacking any warship in Yemen. By selecting this option, he could maintain his status by hitting the US back, but he would not confine himself so narrowly to a specific type of ship. While it might not fully satisfy his desire for revenge, it would likely be interpreted as a counterattack by those who were aware of its necessity. Further, there is evidence that bin Laden considered ordering a general attack upon a US warship in Yemen, rather than one of a specific type (see National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004).

Bin Laden could also choose to retarget the attack slightly. Originally, the al-Qaeda coordinators in Yemen had intended to target "a commercial vessel, specifically an oil tanker" (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004, 190). Changing targets in this manner would involve a relatively smooth transition (the planning would be essentially the same), and, as it had been their idea in the first place, it would not be difficult to persuade the team to undertake the mission. However, it would not allow bin Laden to seek the revenge against the US military that he so desired (see Gunaratna 2002).

To change the plan more significantly, bin Laden could shift to an attack on a non-maritime representation of the US presence. In 1998, al-Qaeda had struck US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, "rival[ing] the worst attacks in memory" (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004, 118), and killing over 200 people in two countries (Robinson 2002; Williams 2004). The attacks were highly successful not only in the amount

of damage that they did, but also in bringing al-Qaeda (as well as Osama bin Laden personally) to the attention of the world (Robinson 2002). This would stand out as a potential option, especially in light of its past successes when juxtaposed with the failure against *The Sullivans*. However, like the previous option, it would not have the symbolic revenge aspect to it.

There was, of course, the option to back out of the plan after the botched attack on the first ship. In so doing, bin Laden could rescind the orders to the Yemeni cell, advising them instead to do nothing. At a later date, a different attack could be planned. This was especially viable because bin Laden was personally highly involved in the attack and its planning, greatly impinging upon the cell's autonomy (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004).

In the case of Osama bin Laden, the mass and organizational political dimensions were non-compensatory. Aborting the attack was the only option that would be detrimental to his political standing. Failure to carry on the attack would have affected him on multiple levels. In addition to appearing ineffectual to the masses by not striking back after being hit by cruise missile strikes (see Gunaratna 2002; Burke 2003), he would also appear to be backing out of plans well known within the organization. As early as 1998—just months after the cruise missile strikes on Afghanistan—al-Qaeda began plans to attack a US warship in Aden (Corbin 2002; Gunaratna 2002). Bin Laden's request that they specifically target a warship, rather than a commercial ship is telling (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004). It indicates the importance of the personal honor and revenge criterion. Additionally, in 1998, Yemen was an al-Qaeda and bin Laden stronghold (Corbin 2002; Williams 2002; Burke 2003). The uncontested, strengthening US presence was a blow both to the organization and to bin Laden himself.

It is unsurprising, then, that bin Laden appears not to have seriously considered those options that did not allow him to strike back at the US for its attack against him. When the bombing of *The Sullivans* failed, it has been reported that "the attack was postponed for nine months" (Schweitzer and Shay 2003, 135), "the terrorists had to revise their plans" (Corbin 2002, 94), and that al-Qaeda viewed the failure merely as a "setback," and had "learned … to turn failure into success" (Williams 2002, 103). This indicates that attacking the *Cole* was merely a continuation of the decision to strike back against the US military. Indeed, al-Qaeda exhibits a clear belief in its own self-mastery over events (Picucci 2008). Any failure to achieve a goal, then,

is viewed by the al-Qaeda leadership as only temporary. Despite the fact that other options were presented to him, bin Laden chose immediately to reject any options that did not allow him to avenge his personal honor, which is a major component in the way that he was viewed by his colleagues and others in his organization.

After rejecting the alternatives to call off the attack or to strike targets that were not US warships, bin Laden proceeded to the second stage of poliheuristic decision-making, in which he pursued a maximizing strategy among the remaining alternatives (Mintz and Geva 1997). While bombing a generic US warship would have satisfied the political criteria involved in striking back at the US, bin Laden deliberately chose to target an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer for reasons of personal revenge (Gunaratna 2002). After selecting the best alternative, bin Laden continued to act as a rational decision-maker during the second stage by attempting to maximize benefits within the chosen option. After choosing to attack the *Cole*, bin Laden authorized a cameraman to tape the bombing in order to use it as propaganda for recruiting (see Corbin 2002; Gunaratna 2002; Williams 2004). He also used a framing technique, "attempt[ing] to attribute this operation … to [his] aspiration to aid the Palestinians in their struggle against Israel" (Schweitzer and Shay 2003, 136). By doing so, he increased both his support among the mass public and religious leaders, who sympathize with the Palestinians against what they see as Israeli occupation. This framing allowed him to maximize his already-substantial benefits from the operation.

In the decision that resulted in the suicide attack on the USS *Cole*, bin Laden rejected alternatives that threatened his personal honor in the first stage of the decision-making process. In the second stage, bin Laden selected an alternative on the basis of that option's ability to maximize expected benefits across dimensions. Bin Laden's decision matrix is summarized in Table 5.6, below.

The decision to merge with Egyptian Islamic Jihad

Throughout the late 1990s, Osama bin Laden was concerned with creating a "global Salafi jihad" (Sageman 2004, 46), which would target not only the secular dictatorships in the Middle East, but also—indeed, primarily—the US and its allies throughout the world (Karmon 1998; Schweitzer and Shay 2003; Williams 2002; Ressa 2003; Whittaker 2004). In order to succeed in this endeavor, it was necessary for him to increase his network and to

acquire greater religious backing for his *fatwas* (see Gunaratna 2002). To this end, he attempted to curry favor with several organizations, chief among them Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ).

Table 5.6 Bin Laden's decision to attack the USS *Cole*

	Carry out the attack against an Arleigh Burke-class warship	*Approve an attack upon a generic US warship*	*Approve an attack, but upon a different type of ship*	*Approve an attack upon a non-maritime target*	*Reject the idea of an attack altogether*	*Weight*
Organizational–Political	Because bin Laden held a personal grudge against this particular class of destroyer, an attack would give him personal vengeance, and would demonstrate his ability to retaliate. Rating: 7	Bin Laden would be seen as taking some action against those who hit him, however the personal revenge criterion would not be satisfied as fully by attacking a generic warship. Rating: 4	Attacking Americans by and large would likely add to bin Laden's status. However, he would not be able to avenge the earlier missile strikes against his camps, which could potentially lower his prestige. Rating: 0	Attacking Americans would likely add to bin Laden's status. However, he would not be able to avenge the earlier missile strikes against his camps, which could potentially lower his prestige. Rating: 0	Failing to attack Americans at all, after the 1998 missile strikes, would make bin Laden appear weak or incompetent, lowering his personal status and value to the organization. Rating: –4	10
Mass Political	Though it is unlikely that the mass public knew of bin Laden's grudge, they would be pleased that he was following through on his promises with his attack against what they saw to be an inappropriate incursion by the US military. Rating: 7	The mass public would be pleased that bin Laden was following through on his vow to attack the infidel armies in the Middle East. They would be unaware of his personal grudge with the particular type of warship. Rating: 7	The mass public would be pleased that bin Laden was following through on his vow to attack the infidels in the Middle East. They would likely be unaware of his personal grudge against the American warships. Rating: 7	The mass public would be pleased that bin Laden was following through on his vow to attack the infidels in the Middle East. They would likely be unaware of his personal grudge with the particular American warships. Rating: 7	If bin Laden did not strike out at the US military in the Middle East, he would not be following through on his word. His support would likely begin to evaporate. Rating: –4	9

Religious	Because the *Cole* attack would take place in a Yemeni port, this should play well with radical Muslims, as a defensive action against "Crusaders." Furthermore, by framing it as a blow against Zionism, al-Qaeda gains even more. Rating: 9	Attacking another ship or military target under similar circumstances would likely give bin Laden equal benefit, so long as he attacked a symbol of American military hegemony within the Holy Land, and continued to make use of framing. Rating: 9	Attacking an American ship, especially one seen as a symbol of American capitalism, would likely still benefit bin Laden, as it would be seen as a symbol of American economic hegemony within the Holy Land, so long as he continued to make use of framing. Rating: 7	By hitting an embassy or other US government target within the Middle East, bin Laden would be seen as defending the Holy Land from the Crusaders. Rating: 9	Bin Laden's appeal to militant religious fanatics lies in his calls to remove the infidels from the Holy Land. By not making good on his threats, he would lose cachet with these groups. Rating: –4	8
Strategic	Attacking an American warship is both symbolically and realistically damaging to the US and its military power. Rating: 10	Attacking American military targets is symbolically and realistically damaging to the US and its military power. Rating: 10	This attack would do little to undermine America's strategic power; its impact would be primarily psychological and economic. Rating: 3	This attack would do little to undermine America's strategic power; its impact would be primarily psychological or economic. Rating: 3	Failure to attack the US would not alter the strategic dimension. Rating: 0	7

Military	There is little reason to believe there would be a military response. Though there would be some al-Qaeda deaths from the bombing, its use in recruitment videos would attract a greater number of new recruits. Rating: 7	There would likely be no military response from the US, and so long as bin Laden used a small group for the suicide attack, and continued to plan to use the attack footage in a recruitment video, the new members of al-Qaeda would more than replace the deaths from the attack. Rating: 7	There is little reason to believe there would be a military response. Though there would be some al-Qaeda deaths from the bombing, its use in recruitment videos would attract a greater number of new recruits, though, given the non-military nature of the target, the benefits would likely be mitigated. Rating: 5	There is little reason to believe there would be a military response. Though there would be some al-Qaeda deaths from the bombing, its use in recruitment videos would attract a greater number of new recruits, though, given the non-military nature of the target, the benefits would likely be mitigated. Rating: 5	The only benefit from not carrying out the attack is that the potential bombers would not be killed in the explosion. Rating: 2	4
Weighted total	30.3 (max)	27.3	16	17.6	−10	

The EIJ (as well as other militant Egyptian Islamist groups) had suffered a series of setbacks at the hands of Egyptian security officials. Understanding this, bin Laden began subsidizing the EIJ, seeking to increase his control over the group (Williams 2002; Sageman 2004) and to begin a process of "progressive integration" of the group into al-Qaeda (Napoleoni 2003, 110).

The integration came to a head in February 1998, when bin Laden met with al-Zawahiri and the heads of several other groups, including the Egyptian Islamic Group (EIG), Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan and the Jihad Movement of Bangladesh (Gunaratna 2003). These groups formed an umbrella organization, with the intent to target Americans and Jews worldwide, both military and civilian, and issued a joint *fatwa* declaring this intent.

While the integration of each of these groups into the al-Qaeda structure was beneficial to bin Laden and his goals, it is clear that al-Zawahiri was the most important among them (see Scheuer 2002; National Commission on

Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004; ICT 2005), and the signatory whom bin Laden most desired to keep within the new organization. This is evident not only from his initial attempts at wooing al-Zawahiri into the group—overtures which were not made toward any of the other signatories—but also through his attempts to aid al-Zawahiri when some members of EIJ objected to the shift from "the 'near enemy' … Egypt, toward the 'far enemy,' the United States" (Schanzer 2005, 42). When the leader of EIG found himself in similar circumstances, leading him to retract his signature, bin Laden simply had him replaced (Sageman 2004). These circumstances demonstrate the importance of incorporating al-Zawahiri and his structure into al-Qaeda, and his leadership potential. As a well-respected cleric and a vital partner, al-Zawahiri had the potential to assume the mantle of leadership (or co-leadership) within al-Qaeda, were bin Laden to concede it.

The decision to form a terrorist umbrella organization is not unlike any corporate merger. Indeed, it has even been couched in corporate terms, with bin Laden being described as "the Chairman of 'Terror Incorporated' " (Corbin 2002, 67). Ultimately, in any such merger, it must be decided how power will be shared. The options open to bin Laden and their respective implications are represented in Table 5.7. In this case, there were inherently four options: bin Laden could assume full command of the new group, bin Laden could turn power over to al-Zawahiri, bin Laden and al-Zawahiri could share power or the status quo could be maintained with no merger. By assuming full command, bin Laden would act as emir of the new organization in much the same way he had previously (see Corbin 2002; Burke 2003). Al-Zawahiri would serve as bin Laden's deputy, lending weight to his religious legitimacy and providing counsel and "crucial, practical, know how" to bin Laden (Gunaratna 2002, 26). Under this option, al-Zawahiri would have a great deal of influence (see Burke 2003), but would ultimately be answerable to bin Laden.

Alternatively, bin Laden could have sworn allegiance to al-Zawahiri as emir. Ostensibly, bin Laden would serve as his deputy, providing his own advice. Al-Zawahiri would not only bring greater religious credentials to the highest echelon of the organizational leadership, but also greater experience, as he had been involved in terrorism longer than bin Laden.

The third option would be to merge as partners, and "co-chairs" of "Terror Incorporated." In such a scenario, both men would be co-equal leaders of the new organization. While such an arrangement would, to some extent, bring the benefits of both of the previous options, it is important to

note that it would also mean that neither man would retain full control over his organization.

Finally, bin Laden could choose to reject the merger altogether. This would mean that al-Qaeda and EIJ would continue as separate entities. It would not necessarily rule out any future collaboration, but there would be no fusion of the two groups.

As in the case of the *Cole* bombing, bin Laden's main concern seems to have been political. However, the options in this scenario exerted a far more direct effect upon his political standing. For bin Laden, to accept an arrangement under which he did not have full leadership (i.e., to hand the reins of power to al-Zawahiri or to merge on equal terms) would have been an obvious blow to his personal status. It would not only have resulted in a demotion in rank—the primary component of his organizational political dimension, which is foundational to other goals—but would ultimately also have frustrated some of his goals and lessened his political clout.

It is well known that bin Laden's primary strategic goal was to attack the US and its allies all over the world, with the goals of first eliminating the US military presence in the Middle East and ultimately destroying the US itself (Karmon 1998; Schweitzer and Shay 2003; Williams 2002; Ressa 2003; Whittaker 2004). EIJ and its leadership, however, had an Egypt-first strategy, with the intent of establishing an Islamic state in Egypt (Karmon 1998; Scheuer 2002;). Additional analysis of al-Zawahiri's statements and bin Laden's shows deep philosophical differences between the two, which would presumably be resolved in al-Zawahiri's favor if he were to assume control (Picucci 2008). If bin Laden was to enter into any type of arrangement in which he was not the undisputed leader, the international status of al-Qaeda would have dropped, as its attacks would have been forced to focus more on Egypt and regional targets, the preferred targets of the Egyptian groups (Schweitzer 1999). This would further cause a decline in bin Laden's *personal* status as a terrorist leader and would discourage the achievement of his ultimate goals.

Because of the problems inherent in two of the four alternatives—namely, merging with EIJ with bin Laden as al-Zawahiri's deputy as well as merging and serving as co-equals—bin Laden only seems to have considered the remaining two seriously: to merge EIJ into al-Qaeda, if al-Zawahiri would accept bin Laden's leadership and the America-first focus, or not to merge at all (Scheuer 2002). Indeed, many reports of the merger indicate very little negotiation and simply state that al-Zawahiri merged EIJ into al-Qaeda (e.g.,

Corbin 2002; Gunaratna 2002; Williams 2002; Burke 2003). This indicates that—as poliheuristic theory would predict—options which had a directly adverse effect upon bin Laden's political standing were immediately rejected in the first stage. While al-Zawahiri likely was concerned with his own political dimension, it would not have been non-compensatory in this instance. This is because EIJ had recently been near-fatally weakened through an Egyptian crackdown against terrorists operating within the country (Williams 2002; Burke 2003). To refuse a merger on any grounds would probably have doomed the organization and cost al-Zawahiri his political power anyway.

The benefits that al-Zawahiri brought to al-Qaeda could not compensate for the potential political loss that bin Laden would suffer if he did not retain full command of the group. However, his religious influence and practical knowledge was a clear asset to al-Qaeda (Gunaratna 2002). As is clear from Table 5.7, there would be no benefit at all from refusing to merge with al-Zawahiri. On every dimension, the merger would be superior, provided bin Laden kept control.

As is evident from the table below, the two-stage process of poliheuristic theory (see Mintz et al. 1997) comports well with the evidence regarding bin Laden's decision. Initially, half of the alternatives were eliminated because they failed to meet the political threshold, as in the first stage of poliheuristic theory. In the second stage, bin Laden was left with the decision to merge under his leadership or not to merge at all. Because there was no benefit in not merging, bin Laden chose the superior alternative, and employed a more rational strategy to choose between the two options, which is consistent both with poliheuristic theory and with the decision pattern in the *Cole* bombing. It is also telling that bin Laden went beyond the merger, making liberal use of al-Zawahiri's talents (which has greatly increased al-Qaeda's influence and success), and frequently appearing with him in videos (see Gunaratna 2002; Robinson 2002). This is indicative of a post-selection maximizing strategy. Bin Laden used al-Zawahiri to maximize his benefits from the selected alternatives further. This is once again consistent with bin Laden's decision to strike the USS *Cole*, and provides further evidence that he preferred a rational, maximizing strategy in the second stage.

Discussion and conclusion

According to CIA counterterrorism specialist Michael Scheuer (2002, 3), in order to “nullify the threat posed by Osama bin Laden … we, in the West, must first understand the man.” Although bin Laden has been killed, a conception of how he made decisions remains useful for devising strategies to combat his organization. A thorough understanding of terrorists and their actions is imperative for stopping them. By thinking like terrorists, and by identifying their Decision Codes, states and security agencies can anticipate their moves and potentially prevent them from striking. Learning how terrorists and leaders of terrorist organizations make their decisions is the first step in understanding how they think and operate.

Table 5.7 Bin Laden’s decision to merge with EIJ

	Maintain the Status Quo	*Merge with EIJ, but assume full command of the new group, with al-Zawahiri as deputy*	*Merge with EIJ, and defer to al-Zawahiri, becoming his deputy*	*Merge with al-Zawahiri on equal grounds, assuming co-leadership of the new organization*	*Weight*
Organizational–Political	Bin Laden retains full leadership of his group. His status is relatively unaffected. Rating: 0	The organizations under bin Laden's command would increase in number, thus improving his personal status. Rating: 8	Bin Laden loses control of his organization, though he retains importance. This decreases his status slightly. Rating: –4	Sharing power with al-Zawahiri diminishes bin Laden's status somewhat, though this is mitigated to an extent by the increased number of organizations he controls Rating: –2	10
Mass Political	Not merging would have little effect upon the public's perception of bin Laden. Rating: 0	As leader of an umbrella organization, bin Laden would be seen as a more important figure. Rating: 4	Because he would no longer be in command of his organization, bin Laden's status would decrease. Rating: –1	Being co-equal with al-Zawahiri would not diminish bin Laden in the eyes of the public. Rating: 3	9
Religious	By declining to be associated with a well-known Muslim cleric, it is likely that bin Laden's religious status would decline slightly. Rating: –2	Bin Laden associates himself with a well-known cleric, adding religious backing to his decrees. Rating: 6	The organization would now be headed by a prominent Muslim cleric. This would be a tremendous religious boon. Rating: 10	With al-Zawahiri as spiritual head and co-leader, the organization would have much greater religious authority. Rating: 8	8

Strategic	Because the merger is vital for EIJ's survival, failing to merge could contribute to the downfall of an enemy of the US. Rating: –3	The merger would augment the power of the US' enemies, and by maintaining control, bin Laden could direct them against his primary targets. Rating: 8	Although al-Zawahiri's EIJ did not focus only on the US, the merger would substantially empower its enemies. Rating: 6	As one of the leaders, bin Laden could direct his more powerful terror machine against the US with the full cooperation of his co-leader. Rating: 7	7
Military	This would have no immediate effect on the number of al-Qaeda members. Rating: 0	The soldiers from EIJ and other organizations would add to al-Qaeda's numbers. Rating: 8	The soldiers from EIJ and other organizations would add to al-Qaeda's numbers. Rating: 8	The soldiers from EIJ and other organizations would add to al-Qaeda's numbers. Rating: 8	4
Weighted total	–3.7	25.2 (max)	10.5	15.2	

Using the ADA method, we have analyzed why Osama bin Laden arrived at certain decisions when faced with multiple alternatives. We have shown through this analysis that bin Laden can be thought of as a poliheuristic decision-maker, with particular emphasis on personal prestige, honor and informal political standing among the mass public and members of his organization. These dimensions prove crucial in both organizational and operational al-Qaeda decisions. Bin Laden did not consider seriously those options that will affect him adversely upon such dimensions. He engaged in a two-stage process, deciding rationally among the surviving alternatives, and attempting to maximize his organizational benefits, even after selecting an alternative.

Looking at Table 5.8, it is interesting to note the vast array of decision rules that can explain bin Laden's decisions. There seem to be examples of purely rational rules (e.g., maximizing rules), purely cognitive rules (e.g., prospect theory) and some hybrids (e.g., poliheuristic). While there is no clearly consistent decision rule, it is notable that poliheuristic theory can successfully explain half of the decisions, in terms of both process and outcome, while no other decision rule explains more than one. Moreover, none of the outcomes is directly contrary to what would be selected under a poliheuristic framework. That is, if we were to list the alternative favored by the poliheuristic theory in each of the cases analyzed, our prediction would

be accurate each time, even if there was no process-based evidence for the decision made. It is also interesting to note some of bin Laden's behaviors after making some of his selections (i.e., attempting to minimize losses and maximize gains on the chosen alternative), which are consistent with poliheuristic decision-makers.

Dividing the decisions by type—organizational and operational—there is a fairly clear disconnect. Among the operational decisions (i.e., attacks), each case can be explained by a different decision rule. There is no decision rule that shows up more than once, much less across all cases. On the organizational level, the situation is different. Two of the three decisions were successfully explained by poliheuristic theory (one of which could also be explained by the elimination by aspects (EBA) decision rule), while the other was explained by a cybernetic (satisficing) rule. Because organizational decisions are essentially political decisions, this is not a surprising finding.

While there is no decision rule that is consistent across all, or even most decisions, examining the columns of Table 5.8 reveals a fairly strong and recognizable pattern. The processing characteristics (where discernable) that showed up most frequently were: non-holistic search, dimension-based, order-sensitive (primarily in the dimensions), non-compensatory and satisficing. This list supports the assessment that the poliheuristic rule is most capable of explaining bin Laden's decisions.

This analysis provides a new foundation from which to assess terrorist decision-making. With the evidence that bin Laden was a poliheuristic decision-maker, hypotheses and tests of decision-making as well as predictions of future terrorist acts by his successors and others can become more accurate. In the next chapter, we consider additional decisions by bin Laden, in taking the global Jihad to Europe.

Table 5.8 Summary: bin Laden's decision characteristics

	Holistic	*Alternative-based*	*Order-sensitive*	*Compensatory*	*Maximizing*	*Misc.*	*Most appropriate decision rule(s)*
1993 World Trade Center bombing	Uncertain	No	Yes (in the dimensions)	No	Yes	In this case, bin Laden engaged in risky behavior, because he was afraid he was not well known enough to accomplish his goals (i.e., he was in the domain of loss)	Prospect Theory
September 11 attack	Yes	Yes	No	Uncertain	Yes	——	Expected Utility
Decision not to claim responsibility	No	Yes	Yes (in the alternatives)	Uncertain	No	——	Cybernetic Theory
Decision to claim responsibility	No	No	Yes (in the dimensions)	No	No	Using framing techniques, bin Laden again attempted to maximize benefits on his selected alternative, after employing a satisficing strategy	Poliheuristic Theory
Attack on the USS *Cole*	No	No	Yes (in the dimensions)	No	No	While bin Laden used a satisficing strategy to choose his alternative, he then attempted to maximize gains on that selected alternative	Poliheuristic Theory
Merger with EIJ	No	No	Yes (in the dimensions)	Uncertain	Uncertain	Evidence of a two-stage process, in which bin Laden first eliminated unacceptable alternatives, and then selected the superior remaining option	Poliheuristic Theory Elimination by Aspects

1 Evidence gathered by US officials following bin Laden's death revealed that he was deeply involved in planning of operations until the end of his life.

2 The evidence itself is available from www.ict.org.il/documents/documentdet.cfm?docid=56.

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6 Al-Qaeda's decisions in the European theater

Prior to 2004, large-scale terrorist attacks and suicide bombing were phenomena located almost exclusively in the Middle East and Southeast Asia (Khalaf 2005). Suicide terrorism specifically is a unique and highly effective form of terrorism, and one of which policy-makers in the US and Europe have been especially fearful (see Blitzer 2002; LaGuardia 2004; Mulshine 2005). However, the attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in Great Britain in 2005 demonstrate that major international terrorism (suicide and conventional) is a real threat not only in those areas where it has occurred for many years, but all over the world.

Though they occurred more than a year apart, the attacks in Madrid and London appear to have been connected. In both cases, bombers struck public transportation (buses and trains), and responsibility was claimed by the same two organizations: the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades and a heretofore unknown group calling itself the Secret Organization of al-Qaeda in Europe (Paz 2005). However, speculation about responsibility for the attacks immediately focused upon Osama bin Laden. Experts cited the complicated coordination and nature of the attack as evidence that this was the work of a relatively sophisticated organization, and noted that the strategy followed that of al-Qaeda (Robinson 2002; Nichols 2005; Paz 2005; Roberts 2005).

Many scholars and terrorism experts hold that al-Qaeda operates along two different operational lines. Some attacks (e.g., the *Cole* bombing, and to some extent, the September 11 attacks) are planned or supervised directly by al-Qaeda's consultative council, headed by bin Laden prior to his death (Corbin 2002; Gunaratna 2002). These are often the bigger or more spectacular attacks. However, the organization also employs loosely affiliated, autonomous cells as "subcontractors," who organize and plan the operations, but seek funding or other assistance from al-Qaeda (Greenberg

2005; Paz 2005). The consultative council then chooses whether to accept or reject the proposal (Burke 2003; Gunaratna 2002; DeYoung and Dobbs 2001). In those (relatively few) instances in which a proposal is accepted, al-Qaeda maintains some control over the operation and its timing (Schweitzer and Shay 2003). In recent years, the al-Qaeda network has devolved from the more centralized former arrangement to the decentralized latter (Combating Terrorism Center 2006).

The bombings in Europe have clear links to bin Laden and al-Qaeda. In addition to their adherence to the al-Qaeda global strategy, the names of the organizations claiming responsibility suggest direct links to al-Qaeda (Abu Hafs al-Masri was the *nom de guerre* of bin Laden lieutenant Mohammed Atef), and some scholars point out that these groups were "directly controlled by bin Laden" (Williams 2004, 123). At the least, it is clear that the individuals who carried out the attacks received assistance from al-Qaeda (see Gerges 2005; Prades 2005; Shahar 2005). This suggests that, minimally, the attacks were known to and approved by bin Laden and other members of al-Qaeda's consultative council.

As we have demonstrated in the previous chapter, bin Laden's decision criteria ran along five primary dimensions in descending order of weight: the organizational political, the mass political, the religious, the strategic and the military. These dimensions remained relevant in bin Laden's decision to authorize the attacks in Europe. In order to analyze these decisions, we once again determine the potential alternatives and their effects upon each of these dimensions.

What follows is an analysis of bin Laden's decisions to approve the attacks against targets in Spain and Great Britain respectively. We believe that this is a useful exercise as the attacks took place in a far different context from those analyzed in the previous chapter. Moreover, because bin Laden likely had greater difficulties in obtaining information and predicting outcomes in the European theater (an area with which he was less familiar than the Middle East), there was a great deal more uncertainty with respect to these decisions. Thus, we are able to illustrate another feature of Applied Decision Analysis (ADA): its ability to incorporate uncertainty about utility. We begin by briefly discussing the case of the Madrid bombings. This is followed by a similar discussion and analysis of the London attacks. Next, we look at the alternatives that were considered by bin Laden in these two instances. Finally, we analyze each case using the ADA technique in order to

understand the decisions made by bin Laden, and to compare them to other decisions.

The Madrid bombings

On March 11, 2004, Europe experienced its first major post-9/11 terrorist attack. Terrorists detonated explosives on four commuter trains in Madrid, Spain, killing approximately 200 people, and injuring more than 1,400. Though the attacks were likely not suicide bombings, the physical and psychological damage was massive. The bombings generated fear and anger in the Spanish populace, which had a lasting effect (see Bryant 2004; Woolls 2005).

Prior to the March 11 attacks, Spain had been an active partner in the US-led War on Terror, participating in the Coalition of the Willing that brought down Saddam Hussein's Baathist government in Iraq. Having long dealt with the problem of domestic terrorism (by the Basque nationalist organization, ETA), Spain seemed to be a natural partner, and Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar was a staunch supporter of US foreign policy (Williams 2004). However, while the Spanish government strongly supported the invasion of Iraq, public opinion ran strongly against the war (Woolls 2004a).

Perhaps the most striking result of the Madrid attacks can be found in the subsequent political fallout. Spanish elections were set to be held on March 14, and despite public opposition to the Iraq War, Prime Minister Aznar's conservative party was heavily favored to win (Woolls 2004a; Ganor 2005). However, in the immediate aftermath of the attack, Aznar's Socialist challenger, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, began organizing rallies in which he accused the Spanish government of making Spain an al-Qaeda target through its support of the Iraq War (Woolls 2004b). Promising a prompt withdrawal from Iraq, Zapatero implied that a change in government was the only way to prevent future attacks. On Election Day, voters resoundingly chose Zapatero over Aznar, and Spain withdrew its forces from Iraq soon after. Given the status of the parties prior to the attacks, it is relatively clear that the bombings were an "almost unprecedented strategic success" and that the results were driven primarily by the attacks (Williams 2004; Ganor 2005, 150).

The London bombings

The suicide blasts that ripped through the London subway system on July 7, 2005 were among the first in Europe. The four nearly simultaneous blasts on three subway trains and a bus left more than 50 people dead and hundreds injured. The Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade and the Secret Organization of al-Qaeda in Europe both claimed responsibility for the attacks, as they had in Madrid. And again, speculation focused on bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

These suspicions were confirmed through the release of a tape by bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in which he acknowledged al-Qaeda's role in the bombings (BBC News 2005). Al-Zawahiri claimed that the attacks were in retaliation for "aggression on Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine," as well as Western governments' "spurning … of a truce offered by bin Laden" (AFP 2005). What is most interesting, however, is the way in which al-Zawahiri framed the attacks: the bombing, he claimed, showed that al-Qaeda had moved the battle to "the enemies' land" (BBC News 2005; Blitz et al. 2005). This indicates that the attack was a continuation of the war against the US and its allies in Iraq.

The London attacks were milder than those that rocked Spain. There were fewer casualties than those produced by the bombings in Spain, and the attacks were far less of a strategic success, as Blair had just been re-elected 2 months earlier. Unlike the attacks against Spain, the London bombings failed to result in a withdrawal from Iraq.

Alternatives considered by bin Laden

The statement by al-Zawahiri gives us a glimpse into the workings of the minds of al-Qaeda's leaders. That the leadership viewed these attacks as a continuation of the Iraqi insurgency indicates that they were carried out with the intent of impacting the ongoing war. Thus, the decision to strike Madrid becomes a tactical one: were bin Laden's resources best spent on the direct combat of the insurgency, or through indirect attacks on the enemy's homeland? The decision to attack London was similar: based on the results of the previous attack, would another attack on the enemy's homeland be a better use of resources than full concentration upon the insurgency?

What ultimately became bin Laden's decision to attack Europe was to some extent a decision on how best to pursue his war against the West. This

included the most effective way to defeat the occupation of Iraq, as well as to aid in the overall struggle outside of the Iraq War. The decision ultimately could be distilled into two general choices: concentrate all efforts on the Iraqi insurgency, or launch an offensive outside of Iraq. The latter category, of course, is incredibly expansive. It represents a large range of potential targets for an offensive (i.e., all Western nations, including both those involved in the US-led Coalition of the Willing and European non-coalition nations). For the purpose of parsimony, however, we can represent the Madrid decision as a choice between four alternatives:

1 *Continue to concentrate fully on the insurgency*. Choosing this option would entail bin Laden funneling all available resources toward Zarqawi and his group. This amounts essentially to a "do nothing" type of option, as it would mean that bin Laden and his associates would not have to change strategies.
2 *Move to an offensive strategy against Spain*. By selecting this option, bin Laden would move to an offensive strategy, targeting one of the US' staunchest supporters. The goal would be to cause the Spanish to withdraw from Iraq. While a withdrawal by the relatively small Spanish force would not seriously affect the tactical capabilities of the coalition, it would be a major *political* blow to the US.
3 *Move to an offensive strategy against another coalition member*. Spain was not the only possible target. Bin Laden could target any number of other members of the coalition. The most likely choices would, of course, be those nations that had the greatest number of troops stationed in Iraq, as well as those that were most adamant in their declarations of solidarity with the US. The nations most prone to be targeted under this option would probably be Great Britain, Australia or Italy, though it is certainly conceivable that any coalition member might be targeted.
4 *Move to an offensive strategy against a non-coalition European state*. Several European nations (most notably France and Germany) opted not to join the coalition of nations against Iraq. However, these states had sent troops to assist the US in Afghanistan, and were Western and largely non-Muslim. While less obvious than coalition member nations, these states would still be legitimate targets for al-Qaeda.

In deciding to attack London, bin Laden had a similar set of alternatives. In this case, however, his second alternative would be an attack against Great

Britain. By selecting this option, bin Laden would switch to an offensive strategy, targeting the US' most important ally. The logic behind such an attack would ostensibly be to increase popular dissatisfaction with the Iraq War, which in turn could lead to policy change—as it had previously done in Spain—humiliating or seriously wounding (in a strategic sense) the US. As Great Britain had come with a much larger force than Spain had, a withdrawal would be damaging for the US both politically and tactically.

Analysis: the Madrid bombings

In considering bin Laden's decision to approve the attack against Madrid, the non-compensatory dimension in this case—indeed, the driving force behind the decision—appears to have been the organizational political dimension. At the time, the US appeared to be more concerned with fighting the insurgency in Iraq and its leader, bin Laden's lieutenant—and his agent in Iraq (see Combating Terrorism Center 2006)—Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, than in going after bin Laden himself. Earlier that year, the US raised the bounty on Zarqawi's head to US$25 million: the same price as it had put on the capture of bin Laden (Sengupta 2005). Whether Zarqawi's stellar rise to international notoriety truly threatened bin Laden within the organization is, of course, unknowable. However, his ability to remain in headlines coupled with bin Laden's relatively low international profile must have made it a possibility. Additionally, we must consider the issue of control. Bin Laden wanted to keep the organization firmly under his own political control. Issues with Zarqawi in Iraq became a classic principal–agent problem, with the possibility of Zarqawi's preferences being different from bin Laden's, and the potential for Zarqawi to have taken the Iraq-based organization in a different direction (Combating Terrorism Center 2006).

It is important to note that attacking Madrid was not actually the alternative with the highest utility. Instead, continuing full support for the insurgency seems to have been the most beneficial option overall. Attacks against countries outside of Iraq would result in a shift in focus away from the war in Iraq. While this might potentially give al-Qaeda some political and strategic ground, it is likely that they would suffer militarily in the short run. Additionally, some might view such a move as a retreat from the war of attrition that bin Laden was fighting against the West in Iraq, which could be detrimental to bin Laden in some cases.

The nature of the somewhat conflictual relationship between bin Laden and his subordinate is a crucial factor in the decision to reject an exclusive focus on the Iraqi insurgency. In "commandeer[ing] the insurgency" (Graham 2005) in Iraq, Zarqawi made himself—rather than bin Laden—the campaign's figurehead. In this situation, bin Laden could pour al-Qaeda resources into Iraq, helping to bring about significant results, but the credit would accrue to Zarqawi, as the insurgency's apparent leader. While cutting off assistance to the insurgency was not a realistic option—it remains too important to al-Qaeda's ultimate goals—an exclusive focus on Iraq would result in bin Laden expending most of the cost and receiving little or no benefit. At the same time, Zarqawi would receive immense benefits at relatively little cost. The threat that such a situation would present to bin Laden's prestige dictated that it would be an unacceptable course of action. Rather, it was necessary that al-Qaeda engage itself in projects that would carry bin Laden's stamp more prominently, allowing him to remain ahead of Zarqawi or any other potential rival (Combating Terrorism Center 2006). In light of these factors, the option to continue exclusive funding of the Iraq insurgency was immediately rejected, regardless of the potential benefits on other important dimensions.

The poliheuristic theory is the decision rule that is most compatible with the decision. Bin Laden selected an alternative that had the highest expected utility only *after* eliminating the options that would be politically costly. Decision rules such as strict expected utility or elimination by aspects would lead to different outcomes (in this case, exclusive support for the insurgency). The option to focus only on the insurgency in Iraq was perceived to be detrimental to bin Laden's organizational political status. In addition to placing the world's attention on another major player in al-Qaeda, at bin Laden's expense, it would shift the organization's focus away from his vision of taking the war to the enemy (i.e., large-scale attacks against Western targets). As such, al-Qaeda's strategic vision would no longer be determined solely—or even chiefly—by bin Laden, lowering his political–organizational standing. Thus, this alternative was rejected immediately. Despite the fact that it was a superior alternative overall, its inability to restore bin Laden's honor and prestige makes the decision to focus on Iraq untenable for bin Laden. This constitutes the first stage of poliheuristic theory (see Mintz and Geva 1997). Despite the fact that the choices involving a change in strategy were inferior overall, they survived the first stage, while the option to continue the defensive strategy did not.

In the second stage, bin Laden was left with a choice of possible nations to attack. He used an expected utility strategy to choose among the targets. Choosing to attack a nation that did not join the Coalition of the Willing emerged as the least helpful option, as it would have few positive effects and was potentially disadvantageous on several dimensions. At the time, of the nations involved in the coalition, Spain seems to have been the optimal target. Several factors came together to make Spain an especially choice target for al-Qaeda. The Iraq War had never been popular in Spain, though this hardly differentiated it from other major coalition nations. However, what did make Spain different from other nations was the upcoming elections, in which the challenger vowed to leave the US-led coalition if elected. Because al-Qaeda leadership maintains control over the timing of operations, even when using "subcontractors," bin Laden would have been able to direct the attack to occur at a specified time near the election (see Schweitzer and Shay 2003). The other major coalition nations had elections occurring at much later dates, and so an attack on any of those states was much less likely to result in a significant policy change.

Spain was also important because bin Laden had vowed to attack it even before the invasion of Iraq. Bin Laden sought revenge for the Spanish *Reconquista* between 1100 and 1500 (Williams 2004). Because he had already threatened Spain, an attack would be meaningful and justified. Indeed, it would likely be detrimental for bin Laden *not* to attack Spain after having declared it an important target. Failure to follow through on the threat might damage his reputation.

Of all of the potential targets, only Spain offered the potential for a major change (in bin Laden's favor) in the composition of the forces in Iraq. This can be seen in Table 6.1, which summarizes the decision. As such, it stood out as the most advantageous option of the alternatives remaining in the second stage, and was selected. Interestingly, the attack against Spain succeeded only in half of its goal. Strategically it was a great success, causing Spain's withdrawal from the coalition. However, it did little to recharge bin Laden's international infamy—Zarqawi and Iraq remained top priorities for the US. It is likely that this forced bin Laden to consider a second round of attacks in Europe.

Analysis: the London bombings

In deciding whether to attack London, the non-compensatory dimension appears once again to have been the organizational–political dimension. While the attacks in Madrid had been a stunning strategic success in the battle against a particular member of the US-led coalition (i.e., Spain), they had done little to advance bin Laden's cause in the war. Indeed, the US continued to concern itself with Zarqawi. In spite of the attacks against Spain, there were still reports of bin Laden's "absence from the international 'arena' " (see Al-Bawaba 2004).

As with the decision to attack Madrid, continuing to concentrate fully on the insurgency was clearly the superior alternative on all other dimensions. While attacking Britain (or any of the other coalition nations) would generally be viewed positively, it involved straying from the immediate goal: expulsion of Western forces from the Middle East. The same would hold for attacking a nation not involved in the coalition, though that would be viewed far less positively. By keeping the insurgency as the top priority, bin Laden would demonstrate that he was most concerned with carrying out a war of attrition against the West.

The strategic considerations of this choice are among the most interesting. As evident in the decision matrix depicted in Table 6.2, the results of attacking Britain would be highly unpredictable. In his videotaped message, al-Zawahiri made a clear attempt to link the bombings in London to British policy on Iraq. He also threatened additional attacks if Blair's policy did not change (Murphy 2005). The clear intent in this case was to duplicate the results of the 2003 Madrid bombings, in which the Spanish public reacted strongly to the attacks, electing an anti-war socialist government and unseating the pro-US incumbent party of José Maria Aznar (McCullough 2004). One of the first acts of the newly elected Prime Minister Zapatero was to withdraw Spanish troops from the coalition in Iraq (Valles 2004; Wright 2004). While the Spanish troops in Iraq numbered only 1,300, in political terms, their withdrawal was a major victory for al-Qaeda, and a major blow to the US. The actual British military presence in Iraq is significantly greater, meaning that a withdrawal could potentially have a noticeable military impact. Additionally, the British might be considered the most politically important ally of the US due to the "special relationship" often cited by President Bush and Prime Minister Blair (e.g., Johnson 2003; Walker 2004). Thus, the payoff from forcing a British outcome similar to that of Spain would be immense.

Table 6.1 Bin Laden’s decision to attack Madrid

	Continue exclusively supporting the insurgency	*Attack Madrid*	*Attack a different coalition nation's capital*	*Attack a non-coalition nation's capital*	*Weight*
Organizational –Political	As bin Laden continued to funnel resources to Zarqawi, the latter would continue to gain in political strength and recognition. Rating: –2–0	Bin Laden could re-emerge as a major international figure, reasserting his influence and popularity. Rating: 2–4	The more major coalition partners would be even more likely to give bin Laden international prestige to solidify his position. Rating: 5–7	This would likely be viewed unfavorably, as non-coalition nations opposed the war in Iraq and American foreign policy. Rating: –3–1	10
Mass Political	By funding the insurgency bin Laden could both continue to demonstrate his anti-Western credentials, and show his concern for the local masses. Rating: 6–8	This would be a blow against the US and its allies, and had great potential to remove some of the invaders from the Holy Land Rating: 5–7	While it would be a blow against the target nation, other nations might not withdraw so quickly, and this might be more important to local al-Qaeda supporters. Rating: 1–3	This would do little to appease the masses in the Arab world, as these nations were largely *against* the US and the war in Iraq. Rating: –1–1	9
Religious	Bin Laden would further endear himself to religious extremists by helping to drive the enemy from the Holy Land. Rating: 6–8	Retaliating for the invasions and driving out some invaders would have a highly beneficial effect. Rating: 5–7	Retaliating for the invasions would have a beneficial effect; however, it is more pressing that they be forced out of the Holy Land. Rating: 2–4	Radical Islamists would approve of the attack on infidels, but it would do little to chase the coalition from the Holy Land. Rating: 1–3	8

Strategic	Continuing to provide assistance to insurgency allows the attrition strategy to last longer, increasing the chance of ultimate success. Rating: 4–6	This had great potential to seriously wound the US, and could be a great strategic victory. Rating: 7–9	While some of these nations might be more important coalition partners, the chance of a great strategic success was much less likely at the time. Rating: 0–2	Many European states that did not join the coalition actively opposed the invasion of Iraq. This would likely be detrimental to bin Laden's strategic goals, and might drive them closer to the US. Rating: –5–3	7
Tactical	Based on previous experience and the security situation in Iraq, the success of these attacks would be virtually guaranteed. Rating: 8–10	The Spanish had long been fighting the ETA, so they might have some counterterrorist capabilities, but this would be a new kind of terrorism against which Spain would struggle to defend. Rating: –1–1	Any coalition nation that would be preferred to Spain would likely have more counterterrorist capacity and would be a more difficult target. Rating: –3–1	An attack in a non-coalition nation would likely be highly unexpected, and tactical success would be highly likely. Rating: 6–8	7
Military	Additional resources would allow the al-Qaeda arm of the Iraqi insurgency to increase its recruitment and training, making it a more lethal and efficient force. Rating: 6–8	This would be a higher-profile attack than those in Iraq, with the potential to aid in recruitment to some extent. Rating: 2–4	Attacks against major coalition nations would be very high profile and would probably aid in recruitment significantly. Rating: 5–7	This would be a higher-profile attack than those in Iraq, and would likely aid in recruitment to some extent. Rating: 2–4	4
Weighted total	19.0–28.0	15.5–24.5	7.4–16.4	–1.6–7.4	

Alternatively, the British public might react in the same way that the American public reacted to the 9/11 attacks. In such a case, support for the war might actually grow. Such an outcome would be incredibly detrimental to al-Qaeda, as it would strengthen the coalition forces both politically and militarily. Neither extreme, however, seems to have been likely. The primary difference between the British and Spanish scenarios is in the timing: the Madrid bombings happened just prior to the Spanish elections, while the London bombings occurred several months after Blair's re-election. There

was, then, no potential to influence an imminent election through the bombings. At best, al-Qaeda might cause domestic opposition to the war to increase, which it seems to have done (Xinhua News Agency 2005). Similarly, there was a key difference in the attacks on Britain and the US: while there was widespread belief in the latter that the attacks had come for no reason, many Britons already viewed their country's foreign policy as a motive for terrorist attacks (Sawyer 2005). As such, there is little reason to believe that the British would respond in the same way that the Americans did. Thus, it is unlikely that the attacks would evoke any (immediate) real foreign policy change. They would likely slightly increase domestic opposition to the presence of British troops in Iraq, however, increasing pressure on the British government to withdraw eventually. Ultimately, there would probably be some expected strategic benefit to attacking London, though this dimension's impact would be the least certain.

Uncertainty was also present (to a lesser extent) in the option to attack a different coalition nation. While the possible outcomes were the same in other countries, the uncertainty would be reduced as bin Laden would have greater flexibility. For example, while the British election (as well as the Australian) had already taken place early in 2005, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was up for re-election in 2006 and was embroiled in political strife (see Hooper 2004). If al-Qaeda had been able to turn public opinion against the Iraq War and against Berlusconi to a greater degree through the attack, a Madrid-like outcome would have been secured. However, even a withdrawal by Italy or Australia would be less damaging to the coalition than similar actions by the British, due to the latter's troop levels, rhetoric and the "special relationship" with the US.

The strategic impact of attacking a non-member of the coalition was far less uncertain, as there were fewer potential outcomes. Since the primary candidates for attack (i.e., France and Germany) had not only refused participation in the anti-Saddam coalition but had actively worked against it, attacking them would do nothing to remove foreign troops from Iraq. Thus, a Madrid-style response would be unobtainable through attacks on Paris or Berlin. Indeed, it is highly possible that such an attack might cause these states to reconsider their positions, and to increase their contribution to the War on Terror, making bin Laden's strategic position even more precarious.

As with the previous decision, the option to strike London—the alternative that was eventually selected—did not have the highest total expected utility. While it was positive, it was substantially lower overall than

was the option to continue the defensive strategy. A simple expected utility strategy cannot explain the decision; we must turn to decision rules that contain cognitive components. The explanation for the alternative's selection can be found in the organizational political dimension. It was paramount that bin Laden maintain his position and prestige, and not allow Zarqawi to "snatch his glory" (see Combating Terrorism Center 2006).

Because the attacks against Madrid had done little to reignite bin Laden's international notoriety, it was crucial that he choose the most important ally of the US. Attacking one of the more junior coalition partners, and even forcing them to withdraw fully, was not sufficient to re-establish bin Laden as the chief threat. However, an attack against a more senior US ally could have a more dramatic effect. As such, Great Britain—with its staunch support and significant troop levels—was the optimal target for the second round of attacks. Forcing the British to reconsider their position would be the biggest possible threat to the US' multinational coalition.

The poliheuristic theory is again most compatible with the decision. The time was ripe once again to bring the attack to the enemy, and the maintenance of strict focus on Iraq was harming bin Laden politically, within the organization. Therefore, the latter option was rejected immediately in the first stage. In the second stage, bin Laden was left with a choice of possible nations to attack. He used an expected utility strategy to choose among the targets. Choosing to attack a nation that did not join the Coalition of the Willing emerged as the least helpful option, as it would have few positive effects, and was potentially disadvantageous on several dimensions. Of the nations involved in the coalition, Great Britain was the optimal target because it carried both real and symbolic importance to the war in Iraq. And, because it was of paramount importance to bin Laden that he retain his position at the top of al-Qaeda, it was necessary that the target be important enough to generate sufficient publicity. Though the results would be both risky and uncertain, a successful outcome would grant al-Qaeda the biggest payoff. The expected utility gained from striking Great Britain, then, was significantly higher than the expected utility from attacking any other nation —and the most likely to give bin Laden the opportunity to reassert his dominance—and it is reasonable that al-Qaeda would choose to target London, as it maximized bin Laden's overall utility in the final stage. The two-stage poliheuristic process is clearly evident in this decision. Additionally, despite the fact that the choices involving a change in strategy

were inferior overall, they survived the first stage, while the option to continue the defensive strategy did not.

Table 6.2 Bin Laden’s decision to attack London

	Continue exclusively supporting the insurgency	*Attack London*	*Attack a different coalition nation's capital*	*Attack a non-coalition nation's capital*	*Weight*
Organizational–Political	As bin Laden continued to funnel resources to Zarqawi, the latter would continue to gain in political strength and recognition. Rating: –2–0	Bin Laden would regain the headlines, and could reassert his dominance over the organization. Rating: 5–7	Bin Laden would gain publicity, but this could be as ineffective as the Madrid attacks on this dimension. Rating: –1–1	This would generate some publicity, but would potentially be negative within the organization. Rating: –1–1	10
Mass Political	By funding the insurgency bin Laden could both continue to demonstrate his anti-Western credentials, and show his concern for the local masses. Rating: 6–8	While it would be a blow against a major US ally, local supporters of al-Qaeda would likely see the expulsion of the Coalition from their lands as the more immediate issue. Rating: 2–4	While it would be a blow against a US ally, local supporters of al-Qaeda would likely see the expulsion of the Coalition from their lands as the more immediate issue. Rating: 1–3	This would do little to appease the masses in the Arab world, as these nations were largely *against* the war in Iraq. Rating: –1–1	9
Religious	Bin Laden would further endear himself to religious extremists by helping to drive the enemy from the Holy Land. Rating: 6–8	Retaliating for the invasions would have a beneficial effect; however, it is more pressing that they be forced out of the Holy Land. Rating: 3–5	Retaliating for the invasions would have a beneficial effect; however, it is more pressing that they be forced out of the Holy Land. Rating: 2–4	Radical Islamists would approve of the attack on infidels, but it would do little to chase the coalition from the Holy Land. Rating: 1–3	8

Strategic	Continuing to provide assistance to the insurgency allows the attrition strategy to last longer, increasing the chance of ultimate success. Rating: 4–6	If the outcome was similar to Madrid, this would be highly beneficial; if it turned out to be similar to the 9/11 attacks, it could be very detrimental. There is a high degree of uncertainty on this dimension. Rating: –5–5	Bin Laden could potentially choose a target with a greater chance of achieving a Madrid-like outcome. However, attacking the more junior coalition partners would give him a much smaller payoff. Rating: –2–2	Many European states that did not join the coalition actively opposed the invasion of Iraq. This would likely be detrimental to bin Laden's strategic goals. Rating: –5–3	7
Tactical	Based on previous experience and the security situation in Iraq, the success of these attacks would be virtually guaranteed. Rating: 8–10	London security was fairly lax, though the mission would be far more difficult than Iraq and likely slightly more so than with other coalition nations. Rating: 2–4	It is likely that coalition nations with fewer resources dedicated to the coalition would be slightly less prepared to deal with terrorism than the British. Rating: 3–5	An attack in a non-coalition nation would likely be highly unexpected, and tactical success would be highly likely. Rating: 6–8	7
Military	Additional resources would allow the al-Qaeda arm of the Iraqi insurgency to increase its recruitment and training, making it a more lethal and efficient force. Rating: 6–8	This would be a high-profile attack, with the potential to aid in recruitment. Rating: 5–7	This would be a higher-profile attack than those in Iraq, and would likely aid in recruitment to some extent. Rating: 3–5	This would be a higher-profile attack than those in Iraq, and would likely aid in recruitment to some extent. Rating: 2–4	4
Weighted total	19.0–28.0	9.1–23.7	3.4–13.8	0.4–9.4	

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7 Conclusions and implications for ISIS' decisions

Research on terrorism has thus far focused mainly on understanding the motivation of terrorists and networks of terrorists. In this book we have used a leader-centric approach to the study of terrorist organizations. Almost by definition, leaders are those who make the big decisions and deserve a careful analysis of their decision-making calculus.

Specifically, we have tried to provide answers to the following questions:

1 How do leaders of terrorist organizations make decisions?
2 What factors influence their decisions?
3 Which decision rule(s) do they use?
4 What is their "Decision Code"?

The analysis was based on 32 case studies of decisions made by both former and current leaders of terrorist organizations: Khaled Mashal, Nasrallah and bin Laden.

The "Decision Code" of Leaders was uncovered using the following analytic procedure:

1 Analyze a multiple of decisions of leaders of terrorist organizations.
2 "Reverse engineer" each decision.
3 Identify the pattern of decision-making.
4 Apply this procedure on a large number of decisions to uncover the "Decision code" of leaders of terrorist organizations.

Specifically, Applied Decision Analysis consists of the following steps:

1 Identify the set of alternatives.
2 Identify the set of dimensions that may influence the decision.

3 Assign weights to each dimension.
4 Assign ratings to implications of each alternative.
5 Input the above into the Decision Board software that automatically generates the decision matrix.

The Decision Code of leaders

Hamas

The study analyzed decisions of Osama bin Laden, Hassan Nasrallah and the Hamas leadership. In our analysis of Hamas, we looked at ten decisions. We considered Hamas' different choices concerning PLC elections, determining why they boycotted the first set of elections and participated later. We also looked at Mashal's decision in the *hudna* talks in Cairo in 2005, his decision following the kidnapping of Israeli corporal Gilad Shalit and his reaction to the November 2006 crisis. We also looked at diplomatic, economic and military decisions throughout 2011–2017, ending with the analysis of the decision to publish the "new policy document."

Our analysis of Mashal leads us to believe that he was a veto player who rejected virtually all agreements and deals with Israel (Mintz 2007). His primary influence in decision-making came from his veto power. Had Mashal approved every agreement, he would not have been "counted" in Palestinian politics, and it would have been difficult for him to gain power. In order to acquire the power that he desired, he vetoed a series of decisions. In so doing, he increased his political capital.

Beyond a certain point, however, his policies and decisions were perceived as damaging Palestinians (and especially Hamas) (Mintz 2007). In an attempt to remedy this, he approved a few decisions, but immediately denied having made these approvals, so as not to seem soft and damage the political credibility that he has built up.

Hezbollah

In our analysis of Nasrallah, we looked at his decisions following Israel's withdrawal in 2000, facing the American invasion of Iraq (2003) and the Syrian withdrawal of 2005, his organization's response to the Israeli retaliation of 2006, (as well as a hypothetical decision had Israel not attacked

in 2006), we attempted to look at Nasrallah's considerations facing the political crisis in Lebanon in early 2007, Nasrallah's decision on a lack of overt reaction following the assassination of Imad Moughnieh (2008), his decision on the establishment of a Hezbollah network in Egypt (2005–2008), Nasrallah's decision to deepen Hezbollah's military activity in Southern Lebanon (2009), his decision on indirect intervention in Syria (2011–2012), as well as Nasrallah's decision to attack Israelis at Burgas, Bulgaria (2012). This was followed by an analysis of Nasrallah's decision on direct limited intervention in Syria (2013), his decision on active participation in the fighting in Syria (2015), and finally, Nasrallah's decision to respond moderately after the Israeli attack (2015). By examining these cases carefully, we were able to derive Nasrallah's Decision Code.

According to these analyses, Nasrallah's Decision Code consists of two stages. In stage one, Nasrallah eliminates any alternative that threatens Hezbollah's political survival/standing in Lebanese public opinion and domestic Lebanese politics.

At the second stage of the decision process, Nasrallah maximizes utility on a subset of alternatives that "survived" the first stage of the decision process. From the point of view of Nasrallah, threatening Hezbollah's standing in the domestic political arena is crossing a "red line" (Mintz 2007). Any alternative that is unacceptable on this dimension does not make "the short list" of acceptable alternatives, among which he chooses in stage two (ibid.).

From the point of view of Nasrallah, Hezbollah is first and foremost a political entity with a political agenda, interests and goals. Hezbollah uses terrorism to promote its political goals in the internal political arena in Lebanon. The political side is an essential part of Hezbollah.

If we apply this two-stage decision rule to Nasrallah's decisions, we can explain, and even predict his decisions better than using other theories and methods.

The model can help forecast periods with a higher likelihood that Hezbollah will attack Israel, versus times where it is more likely to be engaged in the domestic political arena in Lebanon.

Al-Qaeda

In our chapters on al-Qaeda, we analyzed several of Osama bin Laden's decisions. We looked at the choices he made regarding attacks on the World

Trade Center (in 1993 as well as 2001), his decisions regarding the claim of responsibility for the 2001 attack, his decision to attack the USS *Cole*, the merger with Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and finally, the two European attacks (London and Madrid).

Based on our analysis, bin Laden's Decision Code indicates that he was more of a self-interested player than an organizational player (despite his rhetoric to the contrary). He was most concerned with accumulating and preserving political power, especially *within* the al-Qaeda organization. Though his interests were generally congruent with the organization's interests, when they diverged, our analysis shows that he selected the option that was most beneficial to him politically. This often meant hindering a potential rival at the expense of additional quality leadership for the group.

Bin Laden's decision rule was not always linear. This was often the case when rivalries appeared in the organization. Though bin Laden saw the personal–political aspects as the most vital components of a decision, his identity was inextricably bound with that of al-Qaeda. As such, organizational factors played secondary roles in his decisions. In cases in which he chose his own personal interests over the good of the organization (e.g., the bombings in Europe), bin Laden's decision tended to follow a nonlinear pattern, eliminating what would be the overall optimal choices in favor of an alternative that most benefited him.

It is because of this drive for power that bin Laden's Decision Code was most vulnerable when a competing leader emerged. He then was willing to sacrifice (to an extent) the benefit to the organization in favor of his political survival. Under bin Laden, al-Qaeda was vulnerable to strategies that encouraged dissension in the ranks, which likely would have caused the organization to destroy itself from within.

The death of Osama bin Laden and the future of al-Qaeda

On May 2, 2011, US Navy SEALs and CIA operatives located and killed Osama bin Laden in his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. This ended bin Laden's reign as leader of the al-Qaeda organization. Following bin Laden's death, his chief lieutenant, former Egyptian Islamic Jihad leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, took command of the organization.

While the replacement of bin Laden with al-Zawahiri may lead to changes within al-Qaeda's operations, there is reason to believe that the

personal–political dimension will remain an important one. As the new leader, al-Zawahiri faced obstacles that bin Laden had no need to surmount. CNN national security analyst Peter Bergen suggested that al-Zawahiri, lacking the personal charisma of his predecessor, may be relatively unpopular within the organization, potentially facing a number of political challenges (Basu 2011). This need to solidify and maintain a strong political presence within al-Qaeda led al-Zawahiri—at least initially—to weight his personal–political dimension relatively heavily. Given the present condition of the organization and his own tenuous position at the top, any potential loss of face for al-Zawahiri could cost him his leadership role.

Policy-makers should be prepared for al-Qaeda to attempt to reestablish its relevance. In order to demonstrate that he is a worthy successor to bin Laden, al-Zawahiri will need to be able to point to successes under his leadership. Choosing to halt the battle or to exercise greater caution would likely cause al-Zawahiri to appear apprehensive or indecisive, and could lead to a splintering of the organization.

The present circumstances suggest to us that the bin Laden-era policy prescription given above remains the optimal counterterrorism strategy. Given the absence of a strong, ideological figure like bin Laden, al-Qaeda lacks the cohesion that it had before. Thus, sowing dissension within the organization may be an even more effective strategy today. Policy-makers should be careful, however, not to create situations in which a charismatic figure like bin Laden could rise to fill a power vacuum. Rather, they should attempt to fracture the organization while targeting particularly charismatic or inspiring potential leaders.

Comparing decision characteristics

Our analyses indicate that terrorist leaders are generally risk-averse politically. Consistent with poliheuristic theory, they typically reject alternatives that are unacceptable on key political dimensions, as these alternatives would damage their political standing. The organizational politics and public opinion dimensions serve as cognitive “shortcuts” in the decision-making processes of these leaders. Each leader appears willing to forego the “better” decision if it appears that it will be too politically damaging, and therefore unacceptable.

Table 7.1 shows the success of the various decision models. Since the decision rules are not necessarily mutually exclusive, it is unsurprising that there is significant overlap between them. What is especially notable in this analysis is the relative success of the poliheuristic theory. Moreover, in many cases, facts surrounding the process of decision-making (e.g., evidence of a two-stage process) provide even more support for poliheuristic theory as an explanatory tool. Ultimately, the analyses in this book—summarized in Table 7.1—suggest that terrorists are goal-oriented, and that leaders' political standing is crucial in their decision calculus.

The effect of organizational structure on the pattern of decision-making

The structure of the organization affects the degree of influence of the political–organizational dimension. In their early years, terrorist organizations compete for market share—they seek public support for their acts. We call this inter-group rivalry, as the terrorist groups compete with one another to dominate the scene and to be the top organization in the given area. These younger groups are concerned primarily with a public opinion dimension, unwilling to accept alternatives that will damage their standing with the mass public, as this could render the organization irrelevant.

Leaders of organizations that are more institutionalized, with a more solid standing in the public, are affected by the political–organizational dimension (the internal political competition in the organization). These groups have a firm foundation, and are unlikely to disappear or to become irrelevant. As such, the leaders and members are concerned with maintaining and gaining power within the group, and may sacrifice the good of the organization for personal expediency. This is intra-group rivalry, as the rivalry occurs within the organization. It can involve the vying for position between leaders, competition for promotion between members, or power struggles between factions. What is important is that the competitors seek real power and control within the group. It is important to note, however, that the public opinion dimension, though no longer paramount, remains one of the more important dimensions. Though leaders are more concerned with their internal position, they still would prefer to lead a top organization to one that has severely fallen in the public eye.

Table 7.1 Usefulness of decision rules in predicting decisions of leaders of terrorist organizations

Organization	*Decisions correctly predicted*			*Number of decisions*
	Rational choice	*Elimination by aspect*	*Poliheuristic*	
Hamas	6 (60%)	5 (50%)	10 (100%)	10
Hezbollah	12 (85.7%)	9 (64.3%)	14 (100%)	14
Al-Qaeda	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)	8 (100%)	8
Total	23	17	32	32

We call the third and final form of rivalry superiority. In many ways it resembles the intra-group rivalry: leaders seek to top one another and become the top figure in their organization or for their cause. The key difference between the two types is that while the intra-group rivalry is a struggle for real authority, the superiority battle is about symbolic power. In organizations affected by superiority struggles, a figurehead leadership position might be as important as one that wields considerable power.

In our analysis of the Hamas, Hezbollah and al-Qaeda organizations, we have found that each fits into one of the categories fairly well. The characteristics that lead the organizations to be grouped as such affect the ways in which the various leaders make decisions, and the dimensions that are of paramount importance to them. While they are all political actors, concerned primarily with their own status, the political dimension can change subtly for each actor.

The most important political factor for Hamas is the intra-group rivalry. That is, factions within the organization battle one another for supremacy. Because Hamas has established itself as a powerful and formidable organization, it has less of a need to compete for market share to establish itself further. Rather, leaders of the factions within Hamas selected alternatives that increased their power relative to their intra-group rivals. This is characterized, for example, by the rivalry between the three major contenders for leadership after the 2004 assassinations of Yassin and Rantissi, as discussed in Chapter 3. While each of the three presumably desires what is best for the organization, they also hoped to propel themselves above their rivals and to assume the leadership of Hamas. This

means that the structure of the organization leads decision-makers to place primary importance on the personal–political dimension. In the first stage of decision-making, the leaders reject those alternatives that will damage them relative to their intra-group rivals. They then select the overall best decision (i.e., the best decision for the organization) from the remaining alternatives.

Leaders of Hezbollah face an inter-group rivalry. However, unlike many terrorist groups in this situation, Hezbollah is not some fledgling organization competing for name recognition. Rather, the group finds itself in this position due to its success in entering into Lebanese politics as a legitimate political party. As such, it must compete with other Lebanese parties for electoral victories, while attempting to maintain relevance among the traditional supporters of such organizations. Leaders of Hezbollah, then, found themselves in a precarious position, forced to seek alternatives that will maintain or increase the standing of the organization in the public eye, thus solidifying their power. Because of the necessity of balancing public opinion, ambitious individuals and factions within Hezbollah have less latitude to engage in intra-group rivalry. The delicacy of the situation could potentially lead to disaster for the organization if its decision-makers choose not to consider the public's view of the group first and foremost. Indeed, the compartmentalization and strict hierarchy of Hezbollah discussed in Chapter 4 both follow from and reinforce this situation. That is, the need to maintain discipline necessitates a hierarchical order. Meanwhile, the strictness of the order precludes even the need for competition among the organization's members, thus making the personal–political dimension far less important than the organizational political dimension for such a group.

Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organization personify the superiority principle. What is important within al-Qaeda is not simply gaining authority within the organization or even gaining power *for* the organization. Rather, bin Laden in particular was concerned with attaining a status akin to "top terrorist." That is, he hoped to be seen as the world's foremost crusader for his cause. In order to do this, he needed both to maintain his position as leader of al-Qaeda, and to make al-Qaeda into one of the world's most fearsome and prominent terrorist groups. The actual ability of al-Qaeda to damage its enemies and bin Laden's actual control over the day-to-day affairs and planning during his era were less important than the symbolic aspect. This is apparent in several of bin Laden's decisions. Early on, it was at least as important for bin Laden to maintain control over al-Qaeda following the merger with al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad because of

the prestige that the position carried as for the power. Even more telling are bin Laden's decisions regarding attacks against Europe. In both cases it would have benefited al-Qaeda more to concentrate fully on the insurgency in Iraq, while bin Laden would gain nothing concrete by taking the offensive. However, by returning his name to the papers—at the expense of his lieutenant, al-Zarqawi—bin Laden was able to reestablish his status and symbolic importance. The superiority principle requires that the leader take into consideration both the personal and organizational political dimensions, as both are necessary for the attainment of superiority. As such, both are non-compensatory. In this case, the decision-maker was not so much constrained by the organizational structure, but rather by bin Laden's own egomania, which in turn structured the organization to some degree.

For each of these organizations and each of the archetypes into which they have been grouped, politics is always important. Indeed, both the personal and organizational political dimensions are among the most important decision criteria in each case. The rivalry types that we have described here determine the relative importance of these two types of political dimensions. By understanding the rivalry, we can understand which dimensions are paramount, and thereby better predict the organization's path.

The insights that we have gained from examining terrorist structures in this book are equally applicable to other organizations. Although we do not examine it in depth, our methodology is similarly effective in illuminating the decision-making procedure of ISIS, which we explore below.

ISIS: some important insights based on Applied Decision Analysis

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been one of the most formidable terrorist threats in the modern age. It is credited with the death of tens of thousands, taking over and ravaging large swathes of Iraqi and Syrian territory, establishing murderous subsidiaries in Libya, Afghanistan and Yemen (among other locations), and executing courageous and deadly attacks against targets in Turkey, France, the UK and other countries. The organization has been active since 2013 under the name "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria,"[1] and has been using the name Islamic State (ISIS) since

2014.[2] At its peak, it controlled more than 34,000 square miles of territory in Syria and Iraq, from the Mediterranean Sea to nearby Baghdad.[3]

Since then, a relentless offensive by various factions opposing the organization, including American, Russian, Syrian, Iraqi and other forces, has succeeded in rolling back ISIS' achievements and denying it a solid territorial basis. Nevertheless, the radical ideology, and ruthless methods of terrorism developed by the organization, will remain influential with terrorist leaders in the future. ISIS has deep roots within global Islamic terrorism, as it was established by al-Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq (al-Qaeda in Iraq, usually abbreviated as AQI), which in turn was established from a pre-existing organization called Jamaat Al-Tawhid wa-Al-Jihad, established in 1999. The organization was led by Abu Bakr Al- Baghdadi (born Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri), who was designated "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" by the US government. On October 27, 2019, the US announced that Al-Baghdadi was killed during a Delta Force raid in northwestern Syria. On October 31, ISIS announced that his successor would be Abu Ibrahim al Hashimi al-Qurayshi, the nom de guerre an individual whose true identity was unknown to the United States. Al-Baghdadi's relatively long tenure as ISIS' leader—especially during the period of the organization's significant increase in power, influence, and intensity of violent activities—present an important research objective, as his decision making patterns and approach will likely influence other terrorist leaders seeking to replicate his success.[4]

The success of poliheuristic theory in explaining the numerous decisions that we have analyzed in this book suggests that if we want to unlock the Decision Code that underlies ISIS' choices, our first challenge is to identify the political dimension of its leadership. In other words, if the non-compensatory dimension for Hamas is intra-organizational, for Hezbollah is inter-organizational, and for bin Laden was both (as he strove for global recognition), what is the non-compensatory criterion for ISIS' leaders?

Once we have determined the relevant dimension, the next challenge is to uncover the dominant decision rule of the ISIS leader (if there is one). What other dimensions (criteria) influence his decisions? How does he arrive at a choice?

During its long and extremely violent existence as an active Islamic terrorist organization, ISIS employed a broad range of tactics, including direct execution of attacks within Iraq and internationally, indirect incitement and encouragement of "homegrown" terrorist activity, nurturing

of regional “affiliates” (a “franchise” model similar to that of al-Qaeda), guerrilla-style activity against military forces in its main areas of operation (Syria and Iraq), and domination of significant territory, which amounts to the waging of “conventional” warfare, control of civilian population and deployment of military resources to hold and expand territory under its control. These varied activities require management by a centralized leadership, which is secretive and strives to limit any external access as part of the group’s militant role. This leadership has remained largely consistent from the early days of ISIS and its predecessor organizations to late 2019. Despite numerous attempts to assassinate Al-Baghdadi, he was able to hold onto power from 2010 through 2019. He was an important focal point for the organization, having survived in his post for nearly a decade.[5] Understanding Al-Baghdadi’s decision-making pattern is therefore crucial to understanding ISIS decisions as a whole. Such an understanding can also help us to understand Al-Baghdadi’s followers, whether ISIS remains whole or splinters into smaller groups, as well as other organizations seeking to adopt similar methods.

Our first task when mapping any leader’s decision-making pattern using the Applied Decision Analysis (ADA) methodology is to identify the “organizational” goals, which are the permanent structure (context) in which the leader operates. Following that, we should examine the particular circumstances (“dimensions”) in which the leader operates within this structure. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi’s decision-making pattern and dominant political influence can then be analyzed using the ADA technique.

ISIS goals and operating model

According to analysis based on extensive documentation caches and other sources, ISIS demonstrates a high level of organizational continuity from the time it operated as AQI in 2004 through the next decade and a half. The organization has maintained its internal cohesion during various patterns and levels of activity, reaching the high point of declaring itself a caliphate, and claiming jurisdiction over Syria and Iraq in April 2013 (Johnston et al. 2016, 6).[6] Although ISIS’ activity patterns changed due to operational circumstances and pressures during its years of retreat in the face of regional and international opposition, it maintained the aspirational objectives

perceived by Al-Baghdadi during this period. The organization's objectives are to:

1 expel all non-Sunni Islamic presence in its areas of operation (Iraq, Syria);
2 establish a Sunni Islamic government;
3 attract worldwide support for its enterprise.

ISIS activities since 2013 reveal the following patterns:

1 Assertion of Islamic Authority: ISIS strives to assert its political authority over (Sunni) Islamic communities, organizations and individuals in its sphere of operation (Ganor 2015).[7] The geographic definition of this sphere has changed throughout the group's evolution. In the earlier years, it covered Iraq only. Practically, ISIS has controlled various segments of Iraqi and Syrian territory during its years of operation though it was expelled from most of these strongholds by the end of 2017. ISIS strives to be the dominant Islamic authority both within the territory it holds directly (for example by setting up Sharia courts and performing other forms of political governance) and throughout the world by directing its propaganda worldwide and calling upon Muslims worldwide to support and join it.
2 Intense Jihadist Propaganda: ISIS is probably the most media- and propaganda-focused terrorist organization in the world. Specifically, ISIS has excelled in creating and disseminating sophisticated materials that focus on visual fear-mongering. This objective supports the first objective mentioned above, inasmuch as the organization's propaganda activities have succeeded in recruiting young people to join its arenas of battle, and in cowing those under its control into obedience (Ganor 2015).
3 Constant Recruitment: Gaining recruits is a critical component of ISIS' efforts to reinforce the social and geopolitical base upon which it relies: the Iraqi (and to a lesser extent Syrian and wider Middle Eastern) radical Arab Sunni community. Therefore, ISIS demands public vows of allegiance (bay'ah) to both caliphate and caliph as a mechanism to enlist moral, financial, and physical support (Sayigh 2014[8]). Crucially, in addition to recruiting the local population, ISIS has recruited significant numbers of foreign fighters and volunteers that arrived in the

area from Western and Middle Eastern countries, to bolster its operations.

Despite its attempts to bolster its strength, ISIS has been beaten back by US-led coalition forces. By 2018, the group had been driven out of Iraq and most of Syria, maintaining a tenuous grip on only a few hundred square kilometers of territory.

Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi

As mentioned above, ISIS operated in a fashion similar to that of its predecessor organizations, especially AQI, which later took the name Islamic State of Iraq. Its leadership has consciously designed the group as a military and political organization, intended to take over territory and build an Islamic state governed by the laws dictated by its strict Islamist ideology. Over the course of its lifespan, ISI was a vertically integrated organization with a central management structure and functional bureaus (Johnston et al. 2016, 7). Between 2010 and 2019, this hierarchical organization maintained a single leader at its helm: Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Understanding the dimensions influencing his decisions will reveal the organization's operational patterns, allowing for the formation of a counterstrategy that can be employed against any future organization seeking to emulate its methods and repeat its devastating successes.

Although further study is required in order to delve into the fragmented and confusing records that are accessible to researchers as to Al-Baghdadi's background and path to his leadership role we can draw upon the leaders that we have analyzed in this volume to posit that the following dimensions played a key role in his decisions:

1 *The Organizational–Personal Dimension*: In the case of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, his credibility and standing within the organization is reinforced by his long-term survival, having faced numerous attempts by American, Iraqi and other forces to eliminate him. It was critical for Al-Baghdadi to survive by establishing productive collaboration with his lieutenants, who were able to provide protection and continue operating while the leader is in hiding.

2 *The Public–Political Dimension*: This dimension is of particular importance, given the centrality of ISIS reliance on propaganda and recruitment in order to expand its operations and maintain its power-base. Notably, Al-Baghdadi engaged in less overt media activity himself compared to all other leaders examined in this book. This may be due both to security reasons and to his shy character.[9] The public–political dimension in the case of Al-Baghdadi is manifest in his ability to project the organization itself to dominate the minds of Muslims in Iraq, Syria and worldwide.

3 *The Iraqi–Sunni Dimension*: A highly useful analogy to understanding the ISIS operating model in its core regions (the "Sunni heartlands" of Iraq) is by comparison to the Taliban/al-Qaeda relationship in Afghanistan. The Taliban has the social and cultural base that connects the organization to the local population, thereby making it difficult for the Western coalition forces or Afghani government to make progress. Similarly, ISIS relies on and is rooted in the anti-Western Sunni insurgency, along with the even deeper feelings of resentment and malcontent expressed by tribes and pro-Saddam Islamic factions operating in Sunni communities across Western and Central Iraq. Maintaining its appeal to this core demographic is one of the key drivers of ISIS leadership, who come from the same milieu: Iraqi–Sunnis with a background of attachment to the Saddam regime (see Sayigh 2014).

4 *The Military Dimension*: Capturing and holding territory, as well as conducting terrorist attacks worldwide, requires the build-up and maintenance of a military infrastructure by the organization. One of the most important tasks of the leader is to ensure a strong material and logistical foundation for the organization's far-flung and intense military activity.

5 *The Religious Dimension*: Much like the other leaders included in our study, the leader of ISIS must take into consideration the fact that his actions are governed by his own commitment to a radical Islamic ideology, encouraging the fight against Western influence, murder of Shiite and moderate Sunnis, and establishment of a traditional Islamic Sharia in areas under ISIS direct control.

Given that our research found Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi to be a politically motivated terrorist leader, the political dimensions in his decision matrix are assigned the highest weight (9). The other dimensions will be associated with lower scores, as we expect Al-Baghdadi's decision-making pattern to relied more heavily on the two political dimensions. Among the remaining three dimensions, the Iraqi–Sunni dimension seems to be most important, as the organization itself relies on the social networks that underlie its political basis in the Sunni areas in Iraq. It was part of Al-Baghdadi's responsibility as a leader to maintain those relations to the benefit of the organization, since the moral and financial support of the population is vital.

Table 7.2 Al-Baghdadi's general decision matrix

	Alternative 1	*Alternative 2 ... n*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal			9
Public–Political			9
Iraq–Sunni Relations			8
Military			7
Religious			7

A sketch of a potential general decision matrix for Al-Baghdadi is given in Table 7.2. The first two dimensions are assumed to be non-compensatory. As with the other terrorist leaders analyzed in this book, Al-Baghdadi could compensate for negative scores on the lesser dimensions by choosing alternatives that have higher scores elsewhere. For example, he could have selected a course of action that was detrimental to ISIS relations with the Iraqi–Sunni population, if that course of action adhered to the Salafi religious ideology. But he would not typically have selected an alternative that hurt his organizational–political or public–political dimensions, regardless of its score on other dimensions. Notably, success in the organizational–personal and public–political dimensions require a degree of adherence to the organization's stated military and religious goals, so there is a relationship of mutual influence between the dimensions. Ultimately, however, a course of action had the risk of damaging Al-Baghdadi's political standing, whether within his organization or outside, would have been rejected at the first stage of the decision-making process.

In order to illustrate how the Decision Matrix created can assist in analyzing ISIS policies and Al-Baghdadi's decisions, we can look at the example of the decision to establish a caliphate over all Muslims in June 2014.

The decision to establish a caliphate

During 2013, ISIS capitalized on strong anti-government feelings and an aggressive response from Baghdad to drive Sunni supporters toward it, fortify its presence in Iraq, and establish a presence in the city of Fallujah. In January 2014 the organization took control of Raqqa in Syria, vanquishing another Jihadi group (Al Nusra Front) that had previously controlled the town. In June 2014, as the Iraqi Army retreated from Mosul, ISIS fighters entered the sixth-largest city in Iraq. With two strongholds in Iraq and strong influence across the border in Syria, Al-Baghdadi decided to take the organization one step forward. On June 29th 2014, Al-Baghdadi announced that ISIS is changing its name to Islamic State (removing any particular geography from its official name) and proclaimed the establishment of a global caliphate, with Al-Baghdadi the caliph (leader) of all Muslims worldwide (see Johnston et al. 2016, 3).

Such announcements were nothing new for the group. In 2006, even before Al-Baghdadi took over leadership, the group's predecessor organization (al-Qaeda's subsidiary in Iraq) joined forces with a number of other groups to proclaim the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). During the next few years, ISI exerted direct control over as a political entity in the areas under its control in Iraq (ibid.). The organization declared the land under its control to be a sovereign state, and its leader was to be referred to as *amir al-muaminin*, the title historically given to Muslim caliphs.[10]

Announcing state-like strongholds, ostensibly governed by strict Islamic rule, over territory captured by Jihadis has been an established modus operandi by Jihadi groups worldwide, inspired by al-Qaeda's doctrine of "liberating" territory from the infidels wherever it can and establishing Salafist regimes over its followers. This time, however, the announcement of a global caliphate from Mosul surpassed the boundaries of previous practice by Jihadi groups. First, the 2014 announcement reflects a global ambition, whereas the states proclaimed by ISI and other previous Jihadi "emirates" were local and defined geographically. Second, using the explicit term "caliphate" (and not "state" or "emirate") suggests an ambition of

overarching religious and political ramifications, purporting to rule Muslims worldwide from ISIS strongholds. The historical Muslim caliphates were led from illustrious capitals like Baghdad, Damascus and Istanbul, by figures revered and accepted as political rulers with legitimacy over a majority (or at least a large part) of Sunni Muslims. ISIS, however, could not claim such influence and importance at that point in time, no matter how consequential the conquest of Fallujah and Mosul might be. What led Al-Baghdadi to announce the caliphate?

The alternatives in front of Al-Baghdadi upon announcing the caliphate can be outlined as follows:

1 Continue armed struggle—no change from previous activity pattern, based on existing ISIS political and military structures.
2 Intensify military activity—as ISIS has enlarged its power-base, now may be the time to increase the organization's footprint by launching more attacks and expanding its territorial gains.
3 Intensify propaganda—calling for support and recruits (both within Iraq and Syria, and worldwide) has always been a central part of ISIS activities. With the establishment of a robust presence across the two Iraqi cities, the organization has access to further resources and prestige upon which it could base its propaganda.
4 Announce global caliphate—this step, while similar to previous propaganda actions, differs in magnitude and in the fact that it puts ISIS in direct conflict with the established religious leadership of the Muslim world. Those authorities are highly unlikely to accept Al-Baghdadi's claim, thus increasing criticism of the organization.

Table 7.3 outlines the considerations undertaken by Al-Baghdadi for each of the alternatives mentioned.

Table 7.3 Al-Baghdadi's decision to announce a global caliphate

	Continue armed struggle	*Increase military activity*	*Increase propaganda*	*Announce global Caliphate*	*Weight*
Organizational–Personal	Consolidate Al-Baghdadi's position within the organization as a strong leader (7)	Increased attacks will strengthen Al-Baghdadi's position as a strong leader, but also expose him to targeted retaliation (–1)	Increased propaganda will strengthen the leader's image (8)	Declaring himself "caliph" will strengthen Al-Baghdadi's profile across the Muslim world; however the lack of established political–religious leadership beyond Iraq may discredit him (3)	9
Public–Political	Increases ISIS visibility and perception of being a deadly organization (8)	Increases ISIS visibility and perception of being a deadly organization (9)	As ISIS is in constant competition with other Jihadi groups, increasing propaganda without additional attacks will discredit the group (–1)	Increases ISIS visibility and perception of ambition; however, also draws criticism of the group from other factions who may resent this step (3)	9
Iraq–Sunni Relations	As ISIS holds territory in Sunni heartlands in Iraq, Sunni pride is restored and ISIS demonstrates its ability to protect the Sunnis from other factions (8)	As ISIS pushes into central Iraq, Sunni pride is restored; on the other hand—Sunni civilians will be more endangered, and feel increased resentment to ISIS rule (1)	Increased propaganda can help with morale and recruitment within the Iraqi–Sunni community (8)	Helps with morale and recruitment among the Iraqi–Sunnis (9)	8
Military	Further attacks are needed to keep the territory gained so far. There's a risk that continued attacks will cause a stronger backlash which will damage ISIS (3)	Further attacks are needed to keep the territory gained so far. There's a risk that intensified attacks will cause a stronger backlash which will damage ISIS (2)	Without increasing attacks, increased propaganda may draw retaliation to ISIS (0)	A highly visible announcement will draw retaliation at the group, thus endangering its military gains (–1)	8
Religious	Continuous attacks comply with the radical ideology of ISIS (8)	Increased attacks comply with the radical ideology of ISIS (9)	Assist with bolstering ISIS image as radical Muslim group (6)	As the "caliphate" is unlikely to be accepted by all Muslims, this step can cause a rift with religious authorities (–1)	7
Weighted total	27.9	15.9	16.9	11.1	

Analysis of this decision reveals a marked gap between the decision that a standard rational choice model would have encouraged and the actual

decision taken by Al-Baghdadi. Given ISIS military gains prior to June 2014, it was expected that the organization would continue its military attacks. Al-Baghdadi opted to keep ISIS military activity at the same level along with the announcement of the caliphate, which was the lowest-scoring alternative from a purely rational perspective. The reasoning behind this choice is that the other alternatives confronting Al-Baghdadi (increasing military activity or increasing propaganda without taking the more radical step of announcing a global caliphate), would be detrimental to him on the political dimensions. Increasing military activity would intensify pressure from Iraqi and Western forces trying to eliminate Al-Baghdadi, while stepping up propaganda without any concurrent increase in military activity could potentially discredit the organization in comparison to other Jihadi organizations. In order to differentiate itself from a public–political perspective, without risking fierce retaliation, Al-Baghdadi chose an alternative that increased his profile significantly, but did not represent a direct threat to any faction opposing him. Thus, it can be demonstrated that Al-Baghdadi's risk-aversion and unwillingness to expose himself to increased attacks on his person or to discredit his organization by launching empty propaganda drove him to announce a caliphate, which took ISIS to a new level of symbolic prominence within the Jihadi movement.

The above analysis reflects an example of how our ADA method and analytical tools can assist in explaining the decisions of ISIS leaders. The two critical dimensions (organizational–political and public–political) create a risk-aversion that drives the organization into strengthening its non-compromising approach to its rivals, and its powerful radical symbolic propaganda. This makes ISIS a uniquely lethal organization entrenched in a very radical form of Jihadist ideology. Further study into other decisions by ISIS leaders and its affiliates will reveal how this pattern manifests across terrorist attacks worldwide and other decisions undertaken by the organization. In further elucidating the decision style of Al-Baghdadi and the ISIS leadership, we offer a list of 14 possible decisions for future study:

1 ISIS' 2012 decision to branch into Syria following the Syrian Civil War.
2 ISIS decision to break with al-Qaeda (2013).
3 2014 ISIS–Al Qaeda partnership agreement.
4 2014 decision of alliance with Saddam loyalists.
5 June 2014 decision to declare caliphate.
6 2014/5 decision to accept Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance.

7 2015 decision to branch into Afghanistan (Khorasan Province).
8 2015 Kuwait mosque bombing (al-Imam as-Sadiq Mosque, Kuwait City, Kuwait).
9 2015–2016 decision to attack two targets in Turkey without claiming responsibility (Ankara bombing and Ataturk Airport attack (June 28, 2016)).
10 2016 decision to split with Boko Haram.
11 2016 ISIS–Taliban truce.
12 2017 decision to withdraw from Syria and form pact with al-Nusra Front.
13 2018 decision to declare war on Hamas.
14 August 2018 decision to publicly announce ISIS shift from caliphate to insurgency tactics against the West.

Conclusions and implications

In more than 30 case studies of decisions of leaders of terrorist organizations that we have analyzed in this book, the military dimension was never the critical dimension in the decision calculus of leaders. Rather, we have found that a terror organization is first and foremost a political entity, with political goals, agendas and interests. Its leader is a political player. Accomplishing political goals and the accumulation and maintenance of political power are the more important concerns for terrorist organizations and their leaders.

Leaders of terrorist organizations typically make decisions in a systematic way—their patterns of decision-making and Decision DNA can be detected and uncovered. Throughout this book, we showed that, consistent with poliheuristic theory, a detailed evaluation of alternatives takes place only on the subset of alternatives that do not threaten the political interests of the leader. For example, Nasrallah does not consider alternatives that involve disarming Hezbollah or a total war against Israel (unless under attack by Israel). He is in the domain of gains and has not risked diminishing his accomplishments thus far.

Methodological implications

The method presented throughout this book, Applied Decision Analysis (ADA), is a unified and systematic methodology for assessing decisions of

various decision-makers. Here, we have demonstrated its usefulness in detailing the decision process of terrorist leaders. Our technique allows the unpacking of the cognitive and not only rational aspects of decision-making. This lets us uncover the non-trivial motives of leaders.

This technique can be applied to any decision-maker in order to determine how he or she will make decisions. As we have demonstrated here, it can be most useful when applied to the decisions of adversaries. By understanding how leaders like Nasrallah make decisions, we can predict what they are most likely to do in the future. This can help us to anticipate and counter their decisions, to recognize and exploit vulnerabilities, and hopefully, it can eventually give us the tools to defeat them once and for all.

Insights for counterterrorism strategy

Western governments, Israel included, appear quite capable of forming a cohesive and even effective counterterrorism policy. Examples include the successful campaign against ISIS from 2017 through 2019, Israel's success in isolating Hamas in the Gaza Strip, allied isolation of the senior leadership of al-Qaeda in the mountains of Afghanistan, and Israel surprising and striking at Hezbollah assets during the 2006 war. However, this chapter argues that what is missing is a strategy to inspire and lead those policy efforts. Such a strategy, if formed, could achieve a long-term effect on the terrorist leaders and their organizations, up to the point of significantly limiting the potential damage they pose to civilian populations. It can also counter—or at least mitigate—attempts by terrorist groups to copy each other and adopt the more successful methods. Al-Qaeda and ISIS have created a worldwide community of followers who will likely try to build similar, and even more lethal organizations in the future. By learning the drivers behind terrorist leaders' decisions, we can hope to stay one step ahead of future leaders who will undoubtedly be inspired by their predecessors.

The analytical framework suggested in this book indicates that within the various heuristics (cognitive shortcuts) used by decision-makers, and terrorist leaders in particular, the political dimension is non-compensatory. This means that when faced with a serious dilemma, a leader will initially eliminate all alternatives that negatively affect his political dimension. This dimension is "non-compensatory" in that any alternative that is unacceptable

politically will be rejected, regardless of its advantage on another dimension. In this chapter, we argue that the dominant specific non-compensatory political factor (inter-group standing, intra-group standing, or both) of a terrorist leader is determined by the characteristics of the organization he leads.

When looked at as a political actor, a terrorist leader is frequently in a position similar to the leader of a party in a pluralist political system—facing the constant need to consider and weigh his alliances and rivalries among factions both outside his organization (governments, rival states, other organizations) and within it (various factions and interest-groups within the terrorist group). These variations of the political non-compensatory factor have previously been explored in the context of the building of political coalitions.

The majority of policy analysis literature treats terrorist leaders as military threats or religiously inspired actors. In this research, we attempt to decode the political logic of the leaders of three prominent terrorist organizations (Palestinian Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah and global al-Qaeda), using a method derived from the poliheuristic theory. The method successfully explains the key decisions of the analyzed leaders, and allows us to suggest a "Decision DNA" for each. Our findings indicate that, like other political leaders, terrorist leaders attempt to avoid major political loss. This risk-aversion affects either the intra-group dimension (the leader's political standing against competing power-centers inside the organization), or the inter-group dimension (the organization's position vis-à-vis other organizations, parties and governments). In each case, the two political dimensions are non-compensatory relative to other dimensions relevant to terrorist decisions (such as military, religious, etc.), and the order of precedence between them is influenced by the organization's structure and its internal political dynamics.

Terrorist organizations can be divided into three broad ideal-types: Hierarchy, Network (with subtypes) and Dune (see Mishal and Rosenthal 2005). Each of the terrorist leaders analyzed in this book (bin Laden, Nasrallah and Hamas leaders) falls into one of these three representative categories. Each "ideal type" of organization has a "typical" political dynamic peculiar to it, and this in turn influences the main non-compensatory principle in this organization's leader's decisions. This results in three distinct decision patterns, into which all terrorist leaders fall.

The difference between the decision-making patterns of leaders of terrorist organizations under study is the dominant non-compensatory dimension influencing their decisions: while Nasrallah, a Hierarchy leader, is especially risk-averse with respect to inter-group challenges on the public–political dimension, Network leaders (such as Hamas leadership) are more than likely to mind the political–organizational dimension most and focus on intra-group conflicts (conflicts with factions within the organization). A Dune leader, of which we currently have one primary example in this book (bin Laden), exhibited a mix of both styles—his decision pattern can be described as "superior," since he constantly attempted to maintain his symbolic superiority over all other contenders to the leadership of the Islamic Jihadist world, and therefore his non-compensatory factor was both the inter- and intra-group dimension.

Our findings are summarized in Table 7.4.

A coherent counterterrorism strategy could target either of the dominant non-compensatory factors, and increase the risk faced by the organization or the leader on this dimension. Either option would be a valid measure of using violence to eliminate the organization and to shift the group's position toward negotiations or a peaceful resolution of conflict. Since our findings indicate that terrorist leaders are averse to risks on their critical dimensions, increasing the expected risk might deter them from acting, or might "push" the organization into a certain behavioral pattern, or policy decision, which is more suitable or expected by the state's point of view. For example, a counterterrorism strategy that would increase the intra-group rivalry in Hamas can result in the organization's leaders attempting to minimize their risks and "tidying up the lines" in the organization instead of directing attacks against Israel. Such a counterterrorism strategy might consist of trying to isolate or co-opt some elements within Hamas, or limit the organization's maneuvering space by blocking its coalition-building efforts. Consequently, the decision calculus of Hamas' leader can be altered so that he agrees to negotiations or offers a compromise solution, in order to avoid a deadly confrontation that would weaken his political situation.

Table 7.4 Critical dimensions and decision patterns of terrorist groups

Organization	*Dominant non-compensatory dimension of leader*	*Decision-making pattern*
Hamas	Intra-group rivalry	*Organizational*: Primarily sensitive to challenges to organizational cohesion and the leader's standing in the organization
Hezbollah	Inter-group rivalry	*Public*: Primarily sensitive (risk-averse) to challenges to the leader's public–political standing vis-à-vis other political groups (outside of the organization)
al-Qaeda	Both	*Superior:* Primarily sensitive to challenges to the leader's symbolic and actual standing constantly attempts to overshadow other competing figures

In general, it's possible to distinguish between two counterterrorism strategies. Each of these two strategies can primarily affect one of the two critical dimensions we have identified, and can be leveraged either to achieve peaceful resolution of the conflict or to impose a deterrent that will decrease violence in the long term.

Friction Strategy: This strategy seeks to increase the direct risk to the organization's assets, either by attacking them or by isolating them out of the organization's reach. Friction strategy primarily targets an organization's intra-group dimension, by creating pressure on organizational cohesion and internal communication between the leadership and the various "nodes" of the organization's network. This is essentially a divide-and-conquer strategy, in that it distracts leaders by forcing them to concentrate on internal, rather than external, enemies. A Friction strategy can be coupled with a dialogue approach, providing a "carrot" that will entice the leader to agree to a negotiated solution in order to alleviate the pressure on the political-personal dimension.

Coalition Strategy: The goal of this strategy is to isolate the organization politically. It entails creating relationships with different actors around the target organization, which will prevent those actors from assisting or allying with the organization. Such relationships could be based either on deterrence or on dialogue and engagement, according to circumstances and policy decisions. The primary critical dimension at which this strategy aims is the "inter-group" factor: the ability of the leader, or of the target organization as a whole, to appear politically viable and a worthy ally to other actors.

Each counterterrorism strategy can lead to several policy choices for implementation in the actual diplomatic, political, economical and military

fields. Those policy choices can be broadly classified into two groups:

- *Negotiated Order Policies*: These policy choices are aimed at establishing an order through engagement with other parties. Such engagements could include political discussions, peace negotiations, trade relations, mutual exchange of messages, and so on.
- *Imposed Order Policies*: This group of policy choices seeks to coerce or co-opt other actors into accepting the order proposed by the initiating actor. Examples could include military attacks, economic blockade, threats, covert activities (such as assassinations), and more.

Table 7.5 summarizes the proposed typology of counterterrorism strategies, the critical dimensions they are primarily targeting, and some sample policy choices that are related to them, according to the above discussion.

Table 7.5 Typology of counterterrorism strategies

CT strategy	*Critical dimension targeted (organizational level)*	*Policy samples: negotiated order*	*Policy samples: imposed order*
Friction	Intra-group (personal–political)	Establish relations with members of the organization; disqualify leader by presenting him as ready to negotiate; enter peace negotiations	Attack bases and physical assets; prevent supplies from reaching the organization
Coalition	Inter-group (public–political)	Establish relations with competing organizations; engage governments with leverage on the organization; support rivals in free elections	Apply pressure on governments with relations to the organization; establish international opposition to the organization; limit access to symbolic assets such as public offices, national symbol and flag

Although Hamas has been contained, Hezbollah deterred, Bin Laden and Al-Baghdadi killed, and ISIS driven back, the fact that such threats keep rising and that organizations learn from each other highlights the importance of achieving a deep, strategic understanding of how leaders of those groups make decisions. This will allow policymakers to be better prepared for the threats posed by, for example, ISIS-successor organizations and imitators. Moreover, by leveraging existing alliances and coalitions, governments can

force the terrorist leader's decision calculus toward negotiated solutions involving his allies, as Israel done by leveraging Egyptian influence on Hamas in order to achieve cease-fire agreements.

The argument presented here seeks to alert decision-makers in Western governments that the advantages of the democratic system and political culture are sometimes detrimental in establishing a coherent counterterrorism strategy, as opposed to a counterterrorism policy. As we have demonstrated in the above discussion, forming a counterterrorism strategy can help focus the efforts directed by the state against terrorist threats by "tailoring" a counterterrorism strategy to the organizational characteristics of the target group. The link between the counterterrorism strategy and the expected influence on the target is achieved through the "Decision DNA" of the terrorist organization and its leader. Understanding the decision patterns of terrorist leaders can lead to the formation of more effective counterterrorism strategies by states engaged in struggles against these violent actors.

1 The full and correct name in Arabic is "Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham"; while "Al-Sham" is usually translated to "the Levant," in the modern context the term refers to Syria, hence the popular denomination "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS). Other names for the same organization are "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) and Islamic State. In many cases the organization has been referred to in its Arabic name Daesh (which is in itself an abbreviation).
2 See www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-declares-new-islamic-state-in-middle-east-with-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-as-emir-removing-iraq-and-9571374.html.
3 See https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/index.html and https://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/08/world/isis-fast-facts/index.html.
4 See https://rewardsforjustice.net/english/abu_dua.html.
5 See https://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/iraqi-insurgent-group-names-new-leaders/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0.
6 See www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1192.html.
7 See www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/436/html.
8 See http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=56203.
9 See www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10948846/How-a-talented-footballer-became-worlds-most-wanted-man-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadi.html.
10 See www.memri.org/reports/islamist-websites-monitor-no-8.

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